Woodsy Neighbors of Tan and Teckle

Charles Lee Bryson

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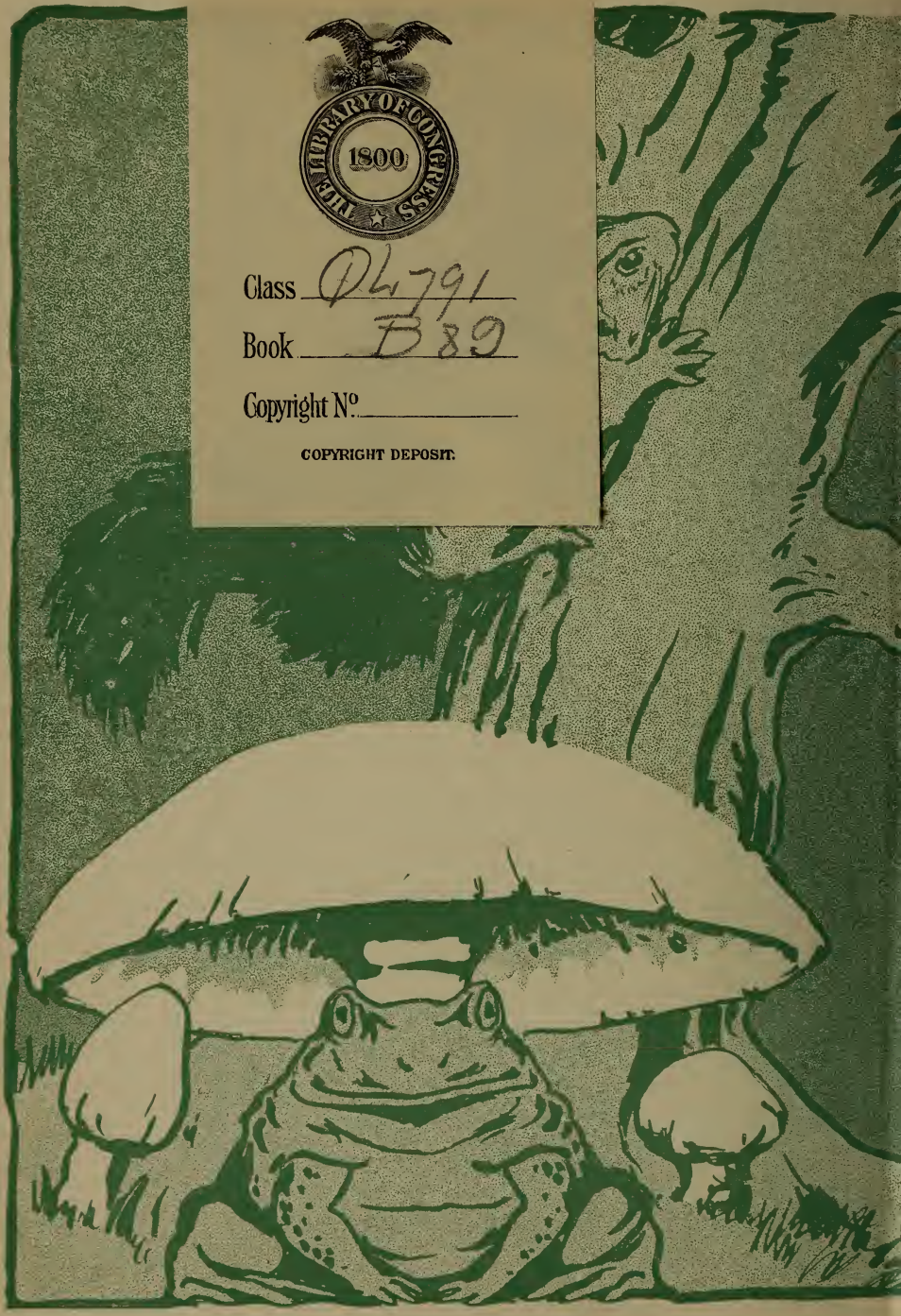
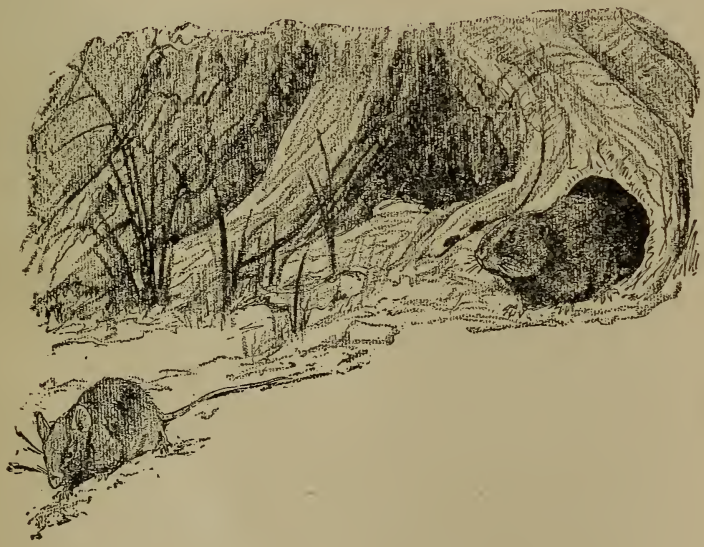


WOODSY NEIGHBOURS
of
TAN AND TECKLE



CHARLES LEE BRYSON'S
NATURE STORIES

WOODSY NEIGHBORS OF TAN AND TECKLE

Further adventures of Tan and Teckle and their tiny neighbors in field and forest. The author succeeds in fascinating children with his tales of minute creatures as "Uncle Remus" has done with his Bre'r Rabbit, Bre'r Fox and other animals of the woods.

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As the *Denver Post* says: "Tan and Teckle is but a live wire of interest which connects all human children big and little, with those millions of other children of the soil whose rights on earth are far better than ours."

Illustrated by Charles Livingston Bull

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"THE RABBIT WAS RUNNING WITH EVERY NERVE IN HIS BODY STRAINED ALMOST TO THE BREAKING POINT" (See page 41)

Woodsy Neighbours of Tan and Teckle

By
CHARLES LEE BRYSON

Illustrated by
CHARLES LIVINGSTON BULL

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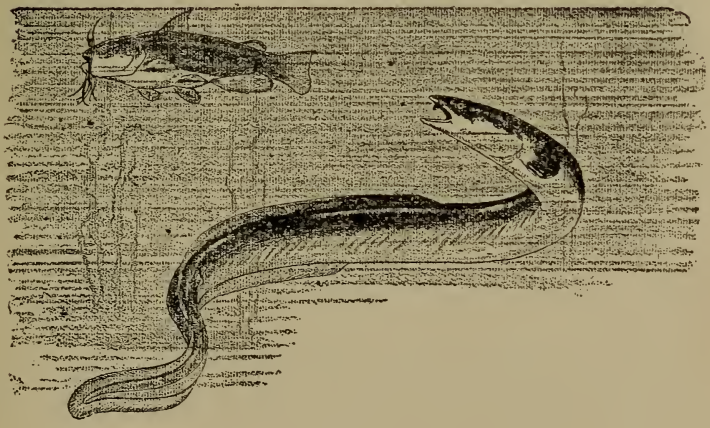
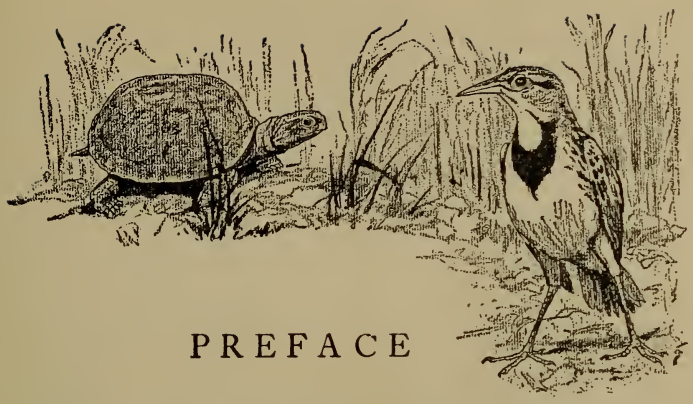
No. 1.

To
MINNETTA
the little girl who first heard
and loved these stories





PREFACE

SO many kind messages have come to me, especially from young folks, regarding "Tan and Teckle," the book issued three years ago, that I feel sure of a welcome at least from the children for this, a second series of stories about the little wild people of meadow, field and woodland.

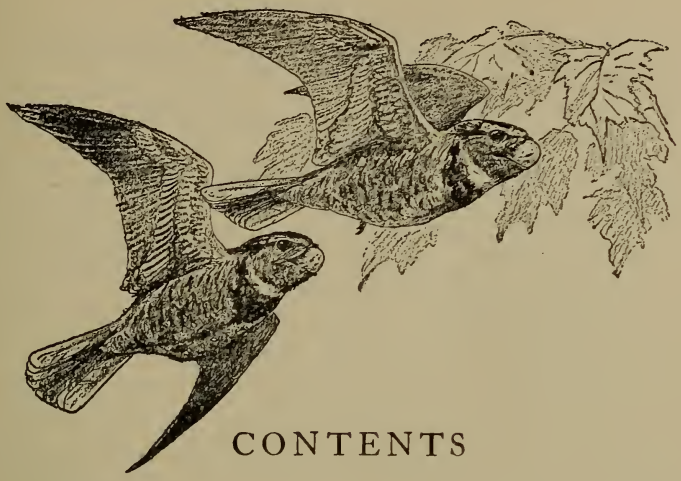
The basis of all these stories is my experience as one of the three barefoot boys on the old farm in Southern Indiana, when nothing that lived was too small and despised to excite curiosity, and curiosity gratified never failed to reveal some new trait—new to us, at least—of bird or reptile or insect. This foundation was, of course, built upon by later reading and study.

The stories are meant especially for young folks, for I feel sure that if the little ones become interested in even the simple things related here, a foundation will be laid for many a delightful hour when they come to watch on their own account how the spider works, the cricket fiddles, the caterpillar spins and the moth comes forth from his cocoon.

There is so much that every day passes unnoticed right under our eyes, and so much is yet to be learned of the lives of our tiny neighbours that live near the ground, that no child ever need be lonely or idle so long as there is an ant or a fly or a bee or a spider that he can watch. These little stories are not meant to be lessons in natural history so much as to call the attention of the young folks to things so easy to see but so often neglected, and to set them to observing and studying and experimenting for themselves.

C. L. B.

Denver, Col.



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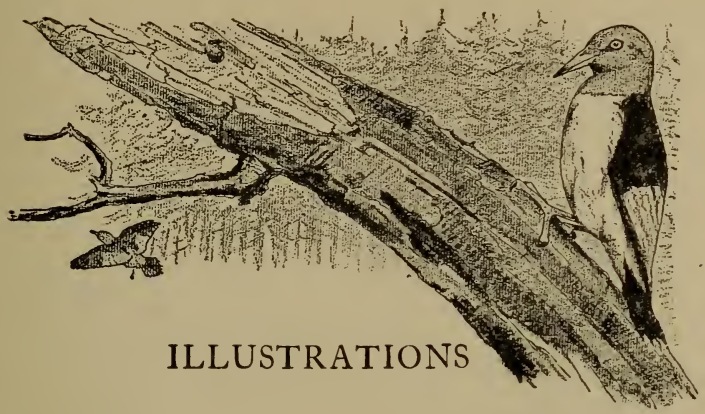

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A STRANGE FLYER

SOMETHING that looked like a piece of bark dropped from the top of the tall, dead snag of a poplar tree on the bank of Nineveh creek, and fell towards the ground. Yet it did not fall as a piece of bark would. Everybody who has seen bark drop from a dead tree knows that it falls swiftly and straight to the ground, sometimes turning edgewise and sometimes turning over and over, but always falling faster and faster until it strikes with a thump.

This did not. It did not turn edgewise, it did not turn over and over, and its speed did

not increase. Neither did it strike the ground with a thump that could be heard. No, it started from the tree with its flat side towards the ground, and sailed away at an angle, finally striking the trunk of a maple tree not far from the ground, and disappearing. Assuredly it did not fall to the ground.

Now there was no wind stirring which could have blown it to one side. The evening was perfectly still. So Tan and Teckle, the pair of little field-mice who dwelt in the old oak stump on the bank of Pleasant Run brook, just above where it flows into Nineveh creek, sat motionless in their doorway and wondered.

Presently a second object, looking like another piece of dead bark, dropped from the top of the old poplar snag. This, too, did not fall directly to the ground, but kept one flat side towards the earth and sailed away. Neither did it take the same direction as the first, but went quite the opposite way. So of course it could not have been the wind that blew them aside, for it would have blown

them both in the same direction. This one, also, seemed to strike against a tree trunk and noiselessly vanish. Then in rapid succession several more of these strange objects shot out from the top of the old poplar snag as if they had been thrown forcibly away from it, and sailed away in various directions.

It was strange, and the timid little field-mice had long ago learned to look with suspicion upon anything strange. The unfamiliar so often proved to be dangerous. They were afraid of strange forms that seemed to fall and yet never touched the ground and never made any noise. So they ran back into the depths of their hollow stump to ask their cousin the bat who always slept in their stump by day. He was still hanging by his hind claws with his head down, just as he always slept, but he was now awake and just ready to fly out and make his dinner off the insects that flew about in the twilight. It was very early in the fall, and there were still plenty of insects for him to eat.

"Flying squirrels," said the bat, when they

had told him of the strange things they had seen. "How does it happen that you have never seen them before? No, they do not really fly as I do. They cannot fly upward because they cannot flap their wings—indeed they have no true wings, but merely flaps of loose skin stretched between their front and their hind legs. They leap from a tree, spread out all four legs so as to stretch this loose skin, and they sail downward at an angle, turning to either side as they choose. They oughtn't to call that flying, for all they can do is to sail downward, or sail upward for just a little way when they get a good speed. Now I'll show you how real flying is done."

So the bat climbed out on top of the hollow stump, hobbled awkwardly to the edge and flapped away, and sure enough he was soon soaring and diving and flapping and leaping in the air above their heads. He flew as well as any bird, and a great deal better than many birds, though he is built so differently.

But Tan and Teckle were greatly interested in the flying squirrels. Now that they knew

there was no danger, they watched evening after evening, for so long as the warm weather lasted the squirrels came out as soon as it was dusk and played all over the woodland. One night while Tan and Teckle sat at one of their doorways watching the squirrels racing about among the trees, one of the strange little fellows sailed down and alighted on the side of the stump quite near them.

"May you never know fear, Brother," said Tan, politely.

"A dry nest and plenty of nuts," was the greeting of the other.

Then Tan made bold to ask the squirrel how it was that, having no wings, he could fly so well; and whether it was not very dangerous. And while he rested the little stranger told much about the merry lives led by the flying squirrels.

"Dangerous?" he replied in a tone of surprise. "Of course it is not dangerous. All one has to do is just to leap forth and spread the legs as far as they will go. Then you just naturally fly anywhere you wish. I have no

doubt you could do it very well yourself if you would only try. Be sure you climb high before you leap, so that you will have a long way to sail. How could you think it dangerous?"

But the field-mice knew better than to make any attempts at flying. They asked the flying squirrel if that was all one family playing together among the trees.

"Oh, no, not all one family. Dear me, no. My mate and I had in our nest only as many little ones as there are claws on one foot, and one more. We have not all of them now. One fell a trifle short when he was just learning to fly, and dropped to the ground and a red fox got him. I was never quite certain, but I think an owl got the second, though nobody saw what became of him. The others we still have. Our nest was in a hollow elm deep in the wood but a storm blew it down not long ago, so we have all come down here to the old poplar snag for the winter. We are filling it with nuts and corn, and when it gets cold

we will all climb in there and sleep together.

"No, indeed, we do not sleep all winter long like the bat. I think he is a lazy fellow. In the summer-time he sleeps all day and every day, and in the winter he sleeps day and night all the time. And such an uncomfortable way to sleep, too, holding on just by his hind claws and with his head hanging down. It looks lazy, and it must be lazy. Now a squirrel curls himself up into a little ball with his nose between his paws, rolls his tail about him, and sleeps like a respectable animal in his bed.

"And the lazy bat doesn't get enough sleep even when he hangs himself up by the heels every day in the summer, but he must hang himself up for all winter too, and sleep until warm weather without once waking and eating. I know, he says it is because there are no insects for him to eat in the winter. Then why doesn't he store them up in the summer when there are plenty? I think he sleeps all winter just to keep from work.

"Now a squirrel does not believe in so much idleness. We gather nuts and corn in the fall, and store it in some large hollow tree, and when cold weather comes we all climb in together and go to sleep. Of course we have made a big bed of leaves, and as there are so many of us together in a cozy, dark nest, we all lie cuddled up and are very comfortable. And often through the winter, when warm days come, we wake up and eat of the nuts we have stored. When spring comes we are all lively, and quite ready to get out and eat the buds and leaves, and find summer nests and bring up our little ones."

Tan wanted to know more about the art of flying, and whether it were true, as the bat had said, that flying squirrels could only sail downward, and could not fly upward at all.

"No, we do not fly upward as the bat does," replied the squirrel, "but what is the use? I think he looks very awkward flapping around up there making believe he is a bird. Now we sail down gracefully from the top of one tree to the foot of another, run

up to the top of that and leap out again. What is the use of flying upward when it is so easy to climb a tree? Now it is all very well for the bat who has to fly up; it would take him at least a moon to climb a tree, I'm sure."

Which was very probably true.

"See there!" exclaimed the squirrel as a lithe little form went sailing over their heads, "that is my mate. She can fly as far as from here to Nineveh creek without once alighting. And so graceful she is. Why, I remember once ——"

But what it was he remembered the field-mice were never to hear. Just then rang out through the woodland the dreaded "Whoo-oo-oo! Whoo-oo-oo!" of a great owl. He had alighted so softly upon the dead limb of a tree near by that the little people had neither seen nor heard him.

Startled by the terrible sound, Tan and Teckle sprang through the doorway of their home and fled to the innermost recesses of the hollow stump. If the flying squirrel had

followed them he would have been safe, for there was a hole large enough for him to enter. But he was so frightened that he never thought of that. He made a wild scramble for the top of the stump to take a flying leap to the nearest tree. The instant there was a movement the great owl was aware of it, and he sprang for the spot. The little squirrel reached the top of the stump and was just making his leap for the tree when the owl reached him. Out from the mass of feathers shot a great, taloned foot, and with one last, despairing squeak the flying squirrel was carried away.

Safe in their nest in the middle of the strong old oak stump, Tan and Teckle told each other that while it might be very fine to be able to fly, and climb trees and do all the other things that the flying squirrel could do, it was much better to stay near the ground and be safe.

THE NEW MUSICIAN

MUSIC was never wanting in that particular corner of the great old Bradley farm where Tan and Teckle lived. Much of the time in summer the wind was busy rustling and whispering quiet strains among the leaves, and in winter making harps of the bare branches and twigs on which it played weird melodies. To one who loves the out-of-doors the tunes the wind plays are music enough, even if there were no other.

But this was by no means all the music

there. Birds lived in the woodland in great numbers. The fat robins who nested near the farmhouse or in the open maple sugar grove often came that far in their search for food, and always sang at their task. Bluebirds, with nests in hollow limbs of trees, or in knot-holes in the fences, or as sometimes happened, in the pin-hole of a gate-post, warbled their odd little tunes. Oriole and brown thrush and meadow lark and stammering cuckoo whistled and chanted and trilled and called from swaying branch or treetop or fence stake or covert.

Most of these daylight sounds were familiar to the little field-mice, but at night there was an entire change of program and a new set of musicians, except of course the wind. And these who played by night they did not know so well. The strong voice of Old Croaker the toad they knew, for they had seen him at his sleepy singing. The terrible cry of the great owl they had heard, though they by no means considered it music. The high, constant trill of small frogs and young toads was also fa-

miliar. But there was one other note in particular, not unlike the trill of the frogs, which blended into the night chorus and puzzled them.

Then one night they learned all about it. They were gathering nuts under the spreading beech tree that grew near their stump, for though it was still warm and sunny by day, it was growing cooler at night, and good old Mother Nature had whispered to them in her own way that cold winter would soon be there and they must prepare for it, for scratching in the snow for food would be dreary work. They were working in the shelter of an old log where they could not readily be seen by night prowlers, when right beside them, it seemed, sounded a shrill, rasping cry.

Dumb with terror, they crouched where they were and waited. This might be the call of some fierce meat eater who would pounce upon them and eat them on the spot if he spied them. They had learned that the safest thing to do under such circumstances is

to sit perfectly still unless they were quite sure they had been seen. Often the wild thing would go away after a time, without having seen them at all.

So they crouched beside the log, motionless, each with cheek pouches half filled with beechnuts, and waited for what might happen. Nothing stirred. But presently came again that strange, piercing cry—two sharp, quick notes, then a stop. Two or sometimes three notes repeated, then another stop. After a few times the calls were kept up constantly, two or three together with slight pauses between each set. Each trembling mouse glanced at the other, and neither was so frightened as at first. Surely this was not the cry of a meat eater. It was evidently a song of pleasure—most likely a love song to a mate. There was neither threat nor pain nor hunger nor anger in that call. They were reassured.

The thing that puzzled them most was that they could not tell from which direction the call came, nor from how far away. Usually

when any bird or other creature uttered a cry they could say with certainty, "It is in this direction, and about so far away." But this queer call was not easy to estimate. Sometimes it seemed up in the tree, sometimes in the grass beside them. Sometimes it was back on the bank of the stream of Pleasant Run, sometimes almost beneath their feet. They looked around in wonder, for not once had the creature moved—of that they were sure.

Finally Tan was emboldened to creep cautiously a little distance into the grass. Instantly the call ceased, and although he lay perfectly still it was many breaths before the song of the stranger was renewed. When it sounded again it seemed right under Tan's feet, so that he was startled and almost leaped aside. But he held himself quiet, and looked keenly all about to discover the musician. Finally he spied him, clinging to a stem of grass only a short leap away. In form he was very like Cousin Gray, the dusty grasshopper that Tan had known so well in the summer-time, yet there was a difference.

This stranger was the colour of the grass—Tan could tell that much even in the twilight. Instead of being short and heavy, like Cousin Gray, this musician was long and slender, and his feelers, which he kept waving all about, were longer even than his body. His back had a peculiar angle, as if he were deformed; and Tan wondered, as he looked, whether the back-bone had not been broken about the middle, and by some strange good luck had grown fast again, only not quite straight as it had been.

Whatever it was that had made him hump-backed it did not seem to hurt him now, and it certainly did not seem to interfere with his music, for the notes came quick and steady now, with very short stops between each pair—the syllables which men say sound like "She-did, she-did, she-did, Katy-did, she-did."

Yes, it was the Katydid, which belongs to the same family as Cousin Gray, the dusty old grasshopper. But Cousin Gray never was a musician. The only sound he ever made was the clattering of his wings when he made

his irregular, up-and-down flight, or the prodigious bumping and rustling he made when he landed clumsily on the ground or among the dry grass. But this was real music. Tan and Teckle listened delightedly while the new musician sent forth the shrill cry "She-did, she-did, she-did, Katy-did, she-did."

Very certain now that nothing was to be feared from the stranger, Tan crept up to the grass stem on which the musician sat, and even plucked up courage to address him:

"May you never know fear."

Instantly the song ceased, and the Katydid edged around the grass stem ready for flight if there were danger. But the mice kept very quiet and he was soon reassured.

"May the grass be ever sweet and tender for you," he responded courteously. Each had wished the other what seemed to him the most desirable thing in life, which after all is true politeness.

"We have often heard your music before, but never until to-night have I heard it near at hand, or known who it was that sang to us."

This was Tan's way of asking what the stranger was called.

"I am the Katydid," was the response, "but it must have been my brothers you heard before. I came very late from the egg, and this is my first music. Do you like it? Do you think it will win me a mate?"

Not for the world would Tan have given offense, even if he had not liked the music. But he had really been quite charmed by it—all mice are very fond of music—and he readily said so. Then he asked:

"Is that a call to your mate? I have not heard her answer."

"She cannot answer," was the response. "She is silent. Only the males of our family can make any sound; our mates must hear and come to us, for they cannot reply. I may be the very last one from the egg, and so I may never find a mate. Still, I am hoping that there is another almost as late as I, and that she will hear me and come, so I will play on."

"You call it playing," remarked Teckle

timidly. "Is it not a song, made with the voice?"

"No. Very few insects make a noise with the mouth. I have a pair of little musical instruments of hard, bony substance, under each wing cover. When I lift my wing covers and make them quiver, these little bony plates rub against each other and make the music. All the males of the Green Grasshopper family make this kind of music, and the crickets do the same. Always the music is made by the male, and when the female hears it, if she has not already a mate, she goes to him."

The mice went on about their nut gathering, for every day now they had new warning that winter was coming, and nobody could tell how much food might be needed before warm weather came again, and there were beech sprouts to eat. Later in the evening, as they passed back and forth between the old log and their hollow stump, they saw that the musician was no longer alone. Beside him on the grass stem clung another slender, green form,

and they knew that there really had been another Katydid late in hatching, and that their friend's music had not been in vain.

Next evening before the bat left the stump for his twilight flight they told him about the new friend they had found. He assured them that all the little stranger had told them was true.

"Katydid is really a close relative of the grasshopper," he said, "but he is much more agreeable. In the first place, he is very quiet and retiring, and you seldom see him unless you go hunting him, while the grasshopper goes everywhere and meddles with everything. Katydid is a lover of peace and quiet. He keeps out of the hot sun, sits quiet in the shade all day long, and at night he stays in the tall grass or on the leaves of the trees and bushes."

"Will these two lay up a store of leaves and grass to last them through the winter?" inquired the domestic Teckle.

"No need. The first heavy frost will kill them both. But first the female will lay a

great number of eggs along the edge of a leaf, or on a grass stem, or wherever she thinks the little ones will find good food when they hatch. Then her life-work is done. Next summer the little Katydids will hatch, creep out of the eggs, drop into the grass and begin to eat. They have nothing to do but eat and grow, and in the late summer mate and lay eggs, for they live only a single season."

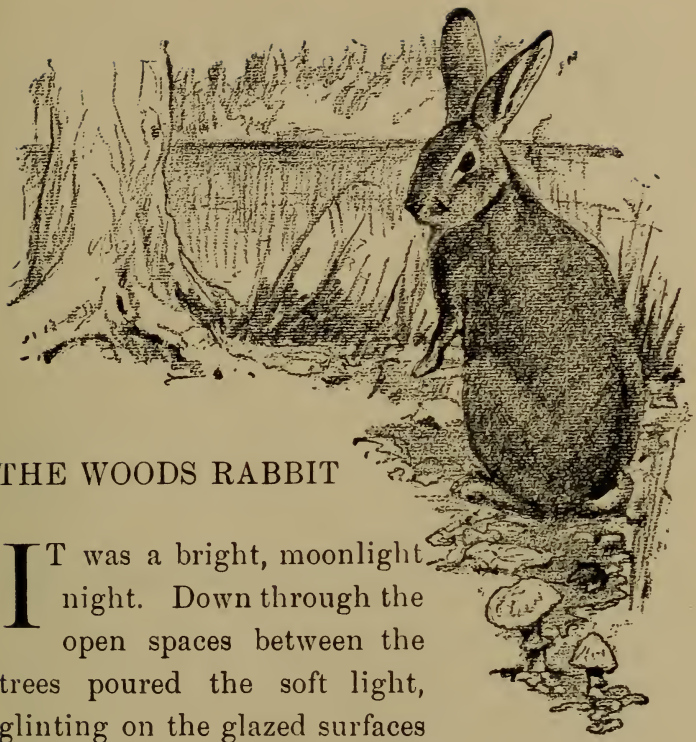
"What was that story a butterfly once told me about his living one summer as a worm, going to sleep in the fall, and waking the next summer with wings?" demanded Tan, who was beginning to doubt.

"That tale is all perfectly true, Little Brother. Some time you will see it happen if you watch. Some of the butterflies spend the winter in the egg, some spend it in the half-way stage of their lives. But it is true that they all come from caterpillars—not worms, caterpillars—and there is a great difference.

"But I must get something to eat and lay on more flesh, for soon it will be cold weather

and I will have to hang myself up in a cave or hollow tree for my winter's sleep. And it is never well for a bat to go lean and hungry into a sleep that must last for many moons."

So the bat scrambled out on top of the stump, and flapped silently away into the dusk, darting here and there among the swarms of insects which flew about in little whirling clouds. He was right, it would not be long until the cold would come and kill them.



THE WOODS RABBIT

IT was a bright, moonlight night. Down through the open spaces between the trees poured the soft light, glinting on the glazed surfaces of fallen leaves, reflected brilliantly from the running waters of Pleasant Run brook and Nineveh creek, allowing darkness only in the densest parts of the wood, and in the shadow of huge tree trunks and in the lee of fallen timber.

Along the bank of Nineveh creek came a grayish form, hopping along with a curious

gait, moving with great caution and making no noise except the rustling when it trod upon a dry leaf. Every few paces it stopped, sat up on its haunches, turned its long ears inquiringly this way and that, wrinkled its blunt nose and sniffed suspiciously, and looked all about with large, round, staring eyes. When neither ears, nose nor eyes warned it of danger, it hopped on a few paces farther, stopped again, and once more surveyed everything around.

Almost anybody could have told at a glance that it was a rabbit. Only the three boys on the Bradley farm, or a few others here and there who had been through the same experiences they had known, would have said that this rabbit was the least bit different from any other "cottontail." The boys would have told you that it was a "woods rabbit."

That is the name the boys themselves gave to that particular kind of rabbit. The name probably will not be found in any book about animals. The boys themselves never knew,

and never could wholly agree among themselves, whether a woods rabbit was really a different species from the ordinary rabbit, but they knew that, at any rate, the individuals were different. It may well be that woods rabbits are just ordinary rabbits, grown wilder and stronger and more wary and a little different in colour since they live so much by themselves and adopt different habits from the rest of the family.

However it comes about, the three boys would have told you that what they called a woods rabbit lives always in the woodlands, and not in the open fields and meadows. He is usually larger than other rabbits, and is stronger and swifter. His gray coat has a reddish tinge—the boys said this was to make him look more like dead leaves and decaying logs, and render him more difficult to distinguish. Also the woods rabbit is very wary as well as fleet of foot, and when he hears any one coming he usually gets out from behind the log, or from under the bit of brush where he hides, and is far away and running like a

deer long before a boy with a gun can get within shooting distance. Another vexing habit—vexing for boys with guns—is that the woods rabbit runs a long distance when once he is aroused, whereas a cottontail will run a little way and sit down, or if a boy or a dog chases him he will describe a circle and come back before long almost to the place where he started.

This woods rabbit had been out to supper. He knew of an orchard, away up Nineveh creek, where plenty of apples had fallen to the ground and nobody had troubled to pick them up. A house had once stood near, but it had burned, and a new one had not been built, and the man who used to live there paid very little attention to the orchard. The little wild people got almost all the fruit.

On his way back from the orchard the woods rabbit had stopped under a red haw tree and had enjoyed the flavour of the tiny fruit, so much like an apple and yet with such a different flavour. Now he was on his way back to

the decaying log under which he usually spent his days, away down the creek, below where Tan and Teckle lived in their great oak stump, and farther even than the place where Pleasant Run brook flowed into Nineveh creek. It was a very large log, so badly decayed that many pieces had fallen from it, so that the woods rabbit looked exactly like a piece of the log as he sat under it. One end of the log lay across another so that it was held a little way above the ground, and the woods rabbit could run in either direction and have the log between him and whatever danger was approaching. Oh, the woods rabbit was wise, and had chosen his resting place with much cunning.

On his way back from the orchard the woods rabbit was in no haste, for it was long until morning, and he preferred to do all his travelling and feeding at night. So he paused frequently to look about, and to enjoy the perfect night. He hopped aside to nibble at a pawpaw which had fallen from the tree without waiting for the frost—or perhaps a greedy opossum,

too impatient to wait until it was ripe, had climbed the tree and knocked it to the ground. Daintily the rabbit nibbled at the soft fruit, and then from force of habit, sat up to look around. All rabbits do that. It is a trick they have inherited from their fathers and grandfathers and great-grandfathers for thousands of generations back. Only the rabbits who constantly sit up to look around are left alive long enough to rear families, and so it is that all rabbits inherit this instinct to watch for danger all the time.

As he lifted his head the woods rabbit heard something that made him forget the pawpaw and sit up very straight indeed. He heard the patter of feet on dry leaves. He was sitting where he could look back over the way he had just come; and away back, along the creek bank, in a very bright patch of moonlight, he saw a lank, yellowish form galloping along with nose to the earth, following his trail. It was a red fox.

No need to tell a woods rabbit what to do. He dropped his long ears back on his shoul-

ders, leaped five times his own length for a starter, and tore away down the bank of the creek with all the speed he had. And a woods rabbit is no poor runner when he is frightened. Of course when he set out to make speed the poor rabbit had no time to choose his steps and run softly, and the fox heard him the very first leap he made. Then the fox saw him, and with his long, keen nose shoved hungrily out, and his bushy tail standing very straight out behind, he went skimming over the ground in pursuit. The fox had his prey in plain sight, and he knew that he would soon have supper unless the rabbit could quickly reach a hiding-place from which he could not be digged out. For he could not only run faster than the rabbit, but he could keep up the pace much longer.

The fox steadily gained upon his quarry, and in a little while he was only a few leaps behind. With eyes distended and nostrils strained wide, the rabbit was running with every nerve in his body strained almost to the breaking point. As he struck the ground

after every leap his hind feet, held wide apart, overreached his fore feet, making the peculiar triangular rabbit track of which the two forward impressions, indicating the direction the rabbit is running, are really made by the hind feet. Just ahead, if he could only reach it, was a place where he hoped to gain an advantage over the fox. He knew where lay a large fallen sycamore tree, hollow for its entire length. And the hole at the farther end was so small that perhaps the fox could not follow him through. The rabbit had made use of this log once when the boys and their dogs chased him, and he had tricked them neatly and got entirely away before they knew that he had not stopped in the log.

When the fox was almost upon him the woods rabbit leaped into the hollow log and ran with all his might to the other end, and squeezed himself out through the small hole. The fox followed him into the log, and as the rabbit had hoped, found the hole at the other end too small to allow him to pass through, so he had to back out and go around. He saw

that he had been tricked, but he took up the chase again, knowing that he could soon overtake the rabbit a second time.

Again the fox came nearer and nearer. The rabbit was now almost bursting with the pressure of the blood which his frightened and overworked heart pumped with terrific force through his arteries, and his lungs were working hard to supply fresh air to his overheated blood. Yet he did not dare slacken his pace in the least, for the place of safety he had in mind was still some distance away. It was an ash tree, hollow from the ground a long way up, and with a hole between the roots just large enough to admit him. He knew, for he had once taken refuge there when a big owl tried to catch him.

This ash tree stood quite near the old water gate across Pleasant Run which Tan and Teckle used as a bridge. Teckle was just coming home from a visit to the old corn field when she heard the patter of footsteps, and an instant later saw the woods rabbit running for life directly toward where she stood. She

had not time to see what else was happening when the rabbit leaped past her and crept into the hollow of the ash tree.

"Run, little one, run!" he gasped as he leaped by, and without waiting to learn why she must run, she leaped into the hollow tree after the rabbit, just as the fox thrust his long, cruel muzzle inside and sniffed. Yes, the woods rabbit was safe for that time, and so was the little mouse which the fox would not have despised if he could have caught her.

A rabbit cannot climb a tree any more than a dog can—on the outside. But when a rabbit gets inside a hollow tree, if it is not so large a hollow but he can brace his back against the farther side, he can climb as high as the hollow reaches if it is large enough to admit his body. So the woods rabbit climbed and climbed until the hollow grew so small that he could scarcely get his breath. There he stopped and rested his tired legs, and got his breath again. Teckle had run into a tiny hole in one of the roots of the tree, and was safe.

The fox sniffed hungrily at the hollow tree, and then sat down and whined. He wanted his supper. But just then he heard something that took his mind off his appetite. From away, away up Nineveh creek came a long, clear call, very faint and far away, but not to be mistaken—"O-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o!" Then another in a different key. Then two others at once. It was so clear, yet so distant and so faint, that it would have sounded beautiful to one who did not know what it was.

But the fox knew. It was the pack of hounds which the three boys on the Bradley farm kept, and they were on his trail, following him just as he had followed the rabbit. The boys did not ride to hounds, but the hounds loved to chase foxes of their own accord, and often they were joined by other hounds from other farms in the neighbourhood, and they had a merry chase that lasted sometimes as long as two days and nights. It usually ended in the fox taking to a hole in the rocks, after which the hounds would go

home, but it was great sport for them while it lasted.

As the baying came nearer the fox sniffed once more at the hole in the ash tree, and set out down the creek at a smart gallop, casting about in his shrewd mind for a plan to baffle the hounds as the woods rabbit had baffled him.

THE SILK MAKER

NIGHT after night Tan and Teckle, the little field-mice, gathered a store of nuts to last them through the winter, and added wool, and hair, and feathers, and grass and moss to their nest to make it warmer. They were very anxious about the long, cold nights to come, for they had never seen a winter. And they were much surprised that their cousin the bat, who slept by day hanging up in their own hollow stump, never made any preparation for winter. They had heard him say that he slept all winter, and the flying

squirrel had said the same thing, but they could not understand how he hoped to go without food all winter, and be alive in the spring. So one evening they asked him about it.

"Of course I sleep all winter and awaken in the spring," he said. "Why should any one doubt it? It is ever so much easier and simpler than to put in all summer working just to eat in winter. That has always seemed so foolish. Why should I do that, when all I need to do is to hang myself up in some dark, quiet place, go to sleep, and not awaken again until it is warm and pleasant, and there are plenty of insects flying about?"

"But suppose you were to awaken in the middle of the winter, cold and hungry?" asked the timid Teckle.

"But I never do. You could scarcely awaken me if you tried, and you certainly could not keep me awake. I remember once a fussy old squirrel climbed down into the hollow tree where I had hanged myself for

the winter, and knocked me from the wall. I roused just enough to fasten my claws back in the side of the tree and close my eyes again, and I knew no more until it was spring, and insects were flying, and I came forth feeling as well as if I had slept only a single day."

"Do all the creatures in the world except just the mice sleep all the winter long?" This was Tan's question.

"Not by any means. Snakes and frogs and toads do, and bats, and a very few of the large animals like the great bear. But most of the warm-blooded ones, and all the birds, are wide awake all winter. Some of the birds fly away to a place where it is never cold, and return in the spring. Others stay here and manage to get enough to eat. You will find that the owl does not sleep all winter, neither does he fly away to a warmer country."

There was another matter on which Tan wanted some information.

"I once heard a great hairy worm, in the warm weather, say that he was going to sleep

soon, and that when he awakened in the warm days he would have large, splendid wings and would fly like a bird."

"He spoke the truth," asserted the bat. "I saw him making his winter bed of silk, and he was mixing the silk with the long hairs from his own body. And I know where he has hung himself for his winter's sleep, for I have seen his bed often. He will sleep all winter as soundly as I do myself, and in the warm days when he awakens he will really have a pair of beautiful wings, and can fly like a bird."

It was a wonderful theme to the little mice, who knew nothing of the marvellous transformation that takes place in the life of the caterpillar, changing him from a lowly creature, crawling on his stomach and eating leaves, to a splendid beauty, with gorgeously coloured wings, flying from flower to flower and sipping the honey from them. So the bat told them the story, and some of the strange things he had seen happen to these fascinating creatures.

"Man makes even some kinds of caterpillars work for him," said he. "He is the only animal that has tried to improve on good old Mother Nature, and wears a kind of false skin taken from others to keep him warm and dry. You wear your fur, the birds wear their feathers, the snakes and fishes wear their scales, the turtles wear their shells, and the insects wear their hard, bony outer cases. But man takes the hair of some animals, the skins of others, the fibre of plants, and even the winter beds of the poor caterpillar, and makes himself a false skin to keep out the cold and the snow and rain in winter, and the sun and heat in summer.

"Time was, long and long ago, before man began to do this, that his skin was thick and tough and his hair long and dense, and he needed a false skin no more than you do. Mother Nature gave him a hairy coat that was good enough. But he loved to be warmer in winter, so he began to put on the skins of other animals that he had killed. Then he learned how to make a kind of false skin by

twisting long hairs and fibres together, and he ended by wearing this false covering all the time, winter and summer.

"Mother Nature always takes away from us all the things that we do not use. When man began to wear false skins he no longer needed his thick skin and his own hairy coat, so they were taken from him. Now man is soft and tender, easily hurt, and he has no hair on his body. If he did not have a false skin to wear he would die of the cold.

"The animals and birds that he has made his slaves and keeps around him are getting to be just like him. The ducks and geese and chickens and turkeys fly so little that now they can scarcely fly at all. The cow can scarcely run, and the horse is helpless and has to be cared for by man. I have even seen horses and dogs wearing false skins made for them by man."

"Does man really compel the caterpillar to work for him?" It was Tan who could not comprehend how that could be.

"Indeed he does. He enslaves every bird

and every animal he can, and the caterpillar is one of his slaves. But I have never heard that he has ever yet succeeded in making a bat work for him."

Now this was a trifle boastful on the part of the bat, for it would have puzzled him to tell when man had ever tried to make him work, or what he could have done for man except to eat the insects as he already did. But of course the field-mice did not know this, and if they had known they were too afraid of wounding his feelings by reminding him of it.

So the bat went on to tell them of the wonderful little silkworm—which is really no worm at all, but a caterpillar, which is a moth or butterfly before his wings have grown.

There are several kinds of moths whose caterpillars spin silk which man uses to make his clothes, or "false skin" as the bat called it. The one that is most used was brought over to this country from China hundreds of years ago. The female moth lays her eggs in

great numbers, and in a few weeks the little caterpillars hatch out. They are furnished by man with plenty of mulberry leaves to eat, for they will thrive on nothing else. They eat enormously, and grow very rapidly. Every few days they grow too large for their skins, so the old skin splits down the back when a new one has grown underneath, and the caterpillar takes off his skin as a child takes off his coat, or "false skin" as the bat would say.

When at last the caterpillar has grown as large as he will ever be, he stops eating for a few hours, lies still and grows sleepy, and then spins himself a silken cocoon, or winter bed. He spins a thread of silk from his mouth just as a spider does from his spinnerets, but the caterpillar makes a much stronger thread. This thread he winds round and round his body, never cutting it but leaving it all in one long thread. When he has used all the silk material he has, or when he thinks his bed is warm enough for the winter, he stops spinning and goes to sleep.

If let alone, the caterpillar awakens in the spring quite a different creature. Instead of being almost blind—a caterpillar can barely see enough to tell light from dark—the moth has a pair of large, brilliant eyes that see perfectly in the twilight or even in the darkest night. Instead of creeping on his stomach and eating mulberry leaves, he spreads a pair of gorgeous wings and goes flying all over the woods and fields, seeking his mate, and playing with others of his kind. That is, he did all this before he became a slave to man. But as the bat said, old Mother Nature soon takes away from her children the things they do not use. Since man has reared the silkworm, the moth uses his wings so little that he can scarcely fly at all, and if this continues, no doubt some day he will not be able to fly when he wishes. Then it will be but another step to his having no wings at all.

As it is, very few of the caterpillars are allowed to sleep through the winter and awaken in the spring. Man has learned that when permitted to have their long sleep, and

come forth with wings, they cut holes in the end of the winter bed, or cocoon, so that they can get out. This cutting spoils the silk, so that instead of unwinding in one long thread, it is cut into many short ones, which makes it much less useful to man. So man allows only a few each year to sleep through the winter and emerge with wings—just enough to lay eggs and hatch another brood next year. All the others he kills in their sleep by plunging them into hot water. Then he unwinds the silk from them, all in one thread more than half a mile long. This is easily woven into silk cloth and made into all manner of clothing for man's use. For, as the bat said, man no longer has a thick skin and a heavy, hairy coat of his own, and must have clothes, or "false skins" to keep him warm.

"Does the moth eat the leaves of the mulberry tree?" asked Teckle.

"No, the moth does not eat at all. It has no mouth at all—or at least a mouth so poorly formed that it cannot eat. Some

kinds of moth have long tongues or tubes, through which they sip honey from flowers as butterflies do, but the silkworm moth does not. I do not know whether there was once a time when these moths could eat, and this power was taken from them because they neglected to use it, or whether Mother Nature made them without mouths from the first. There are several cousins of the silkworm moth that do not eat at all."

"How do they live?"

"They live only a few days or a few hours. Just long enough to mate, and lay eggs for another brood of moths next year. Then they die. But I see the insects beginning to fly," and the bat was off, flying about over their heads getting his evening meal.

A WEIRD LAUGH

NIGHT was coming on. The sun had set, and while there was still a half-light in the open fields and meadows, it was quite dusky among the trees along the creek banks. The little birds and animals and insects that love the sunlight had all gone to their hiding places for the night, and the lovers of darkness were astir. The katydid was fiddling away among the leaves of the old beech tree. The cricket was chirping in the grass. The flying squirrels were sailing back and forth, tobogganing from tree to tree. The woods rabbit was hopping cautiously in the direction of the old, abandoned orchard, and the raccoon was paddling in the waters of Nineveh creek after

crawfish and minnows. The bark of the fox was heard on the far hills beyond the creek, and the hoot of the great owl rang through the woods now and then.

Tan and Teckle, the little field-mice who lived in the old oak stump, were down at the water's edge of Pleasant Run brook, nibbling at the tender roots of the grass which grew green and rank there. Their cousin the bat, who by day slept in the hollow of their stump, was also a night-lover, and was flapping about over their heads, feeding on the flying midges that swarmed in the warm evening air.

The mice kept their eyes and ears open to all the myriad sounds and sights of the woodland, for there were many meat eaters among the wild things that love the night, and not one of them would scorn to make a meal off a plump mouse, and just one breath of forgetfulness might cost one of them his life. They knew the bark of the fox, but he was too far away to be immediately dangerous. The owl's cry they knew also, but he was still deep

in the woods. The chirp of the insects and the trill of the frogs and the night music of various other wood dwellers came to them, but they noted nothing to give them alarm. So they went on nibbling at the grass.

But there arose a strange cry, a shrill, tremulous, chuckling sound that they were sure they recognized.

"There come the boys!" they exclaimed together.

The cry did sound very like a boy's laugh, which they had once heard when the three boys of the Bradley farm tried to dig them out of their stump for the sport of seeing the sparrow hawk catch them. So the little field-mice ran into the tunnel which the muskrat had made beneath their stump, for they dared not climb up the bank to one of their own doors. The muskrat himself, being a night roamer, was out in the brook, swimming and diving and gathering roots for his dinner. But Old Croaker, the great, fat toad, was sitting just inside the tunnel, and to him they told their fears. He was awake, having

finished his day's sleep, or they would have had no easy task to get him to listen. He hopped to the mouth of the tunnel and sat at the water's edge, listening.

Again sounded the queer, wavering cry, this time more like a whistle than a voice from a throat, whereat Old Croaker turned and stared hard at the trembling mice.

"That is no boy," he declared solemnly; "but you would better keep out of his sight just the same."

"But it sounds exactly like the terrible noise the boys make when they are pleased," insisted Tan, who thought he remembered a boy's laugh.

"Not at all. This is a deal softer and more musical—much more like my voice—but it is much more dangerous music to you. It depends on what they are doing whether you live or die when those boys catch you. They caught me once and let me go unhurt after they had tormented me a long while. I have known them catch birds and frogs and mice and all manner of wild things and let them

go. But if ever that creature gets you there is never any getting away alive. That is an owl."

The mice could scarcely believe that a call so different from the terrible hoot they knew so well could come from an owl, but Old Croaker solemnly declared that it was an owl's cry.

"That's the screech owl, and he'd eat you just as quickly as the big owl would. Do you know how an owl eats mice?"

Old Croaker had no nerves himself, and could not understand how such a subject might drive the timid little field-mice into spasms of fear. It was his own boast that he had once been caught and eaten by a snake. After he had been safely swallowed, those same three boys of the Bradley farm had killed the snake and cut him open to see how the toad had fared. And when they found him alive and unhurt they allowed him to go. Terrible as the subject of being eaten was to the mice, they were in a way fascinated by it, and begged Old Croaker to tell how an owl

manages. He had told them before that the snake swallows his prey whole.

"The owl swallows his prey all in one piece when it is not too large," said the old toad, "but he does it differently from the snake. The owl first breaks all the bones of his victim with his beak. Then, if it is not too large, he swallows it whole. If it is too large, he tears it into pieces as large as he can manage, and swallows them. Afterwards he spits out the hair and bones and feathers in little pellets."

"How large is this new meat eater that you call a screech owl?"

The mice were shivering with terror at the idea of having their bones broken and their bodies swallowed, but they wanted to know.

"Oh, he's small. Not a bit larger than the sparrow hawk who had a nest near here in the summer. You remember him, surely."

Of course they remembered Spa, for he had carried off and fed to his nestlings one of their babies.

Tan and Teckle had heard enough. They

climbed up through the long, hollow tap root of the stump into their own cozy nest. Next evening when the bat was awake, but before he was ready to fly forth, they asked him about the screech owl.

"Keep out of his sight," advised the bat. "He is very light on the wing, very quick, and always hungry. He would catch and eat you both in a breath. He would even try to eat me, I believe, if he could catch me. But when I am flying I am just as quick as he, and a deal more active, so he does not trouble me then. And when I want to sleep I take good care to get where he cannot find me, so I am safe.

"But I know that he does catch and eat all manner of little wild folks. I see a great deal of that as I fly about at night. He eats more grasshoppers in summer than anything else—I suppose because there are so many of them, and they are easy to catch at night. But I have seen him catch many a mouse, too. Sometimes he eats little birds, mostly the English Sparrow, of which I am not sorry,

for the sparrow hangs about man all the time, and gets fat and saucy. I have seen the screech owl eat crawfish, and sometimes even worms.

"But do not think that man and the screech owl are friends, even if his call does sound like a boy's laugh. He is just as much afraid of man as you are, and with quite as much reason."

"Why, does man eat screech owls too?"

"Oh, no, man eats very few meat eaters. They are always tough, and he does not like the flavour. But he kills, always. He kills screech owls just because he can. Everything that runs, or flies, or crawls, no matter what, he kills. He has no better friend anywhere, if he only knew it, than the screech owl. It loves to live near his house, it almost never harms any of his slaves, and it kills the grasshoppers that eat his crops and the sparrows that eat his grain and annoy him with their fuss, and the mice that destroy ——"

The bat had not meant to be rude, but he had forgotten that he was talking to a pair of

the mice which eat grain in the fields, in the shock or in the stack, and kill the grass by eating the roots. He stopped short when he remembered.

"It's time I went a-flying," he said, thinking of nothing better, so he scrambled out of the stump and flapped away.

"Well, whatever others have done, we have stolen nothing," remarked Teckle. "We have picked up only what was dropped in the field, and we have not gone near the farmhouse or the barn. So I think man should not count us among his enemies."

"What matter," replied Tan. "It seems he kills his friends as well as his enemies. Wild things kill because they need to eat; man kills because he wants to see things die. I think I like meat eaters better."

But though the mice now knew the cry of the screech owl, they did not know him by sight, and this came near costing Tan dearly a few nights later. He had heard the cry from time to time, and knew that the little owl was in the neighbourhood, but thought it was still

safe for him to go on with his feeding near the old water gate across Pleasant Run. The flying squirrels were out, sailing down in long, easy slopes from one tree to another, and scampering up again to take long, flying leaps to other trees. Several times they sailed right over Tan's head as he sat grubbing among the grass roots for dainties, and he sat up to watch them. Instead of being afraid, since he had learned how harmless and playful are the flying squirrels, he loved to watch them at their pranks. They seemed to be chasing each other, for when one sailed across the open glade from tree to tree he was followed closely by several others, who went scampering up the tree after him, and leaped after when he launched forth to another tree.

Tan had just got a good mouthful of tender grass root, and had stopped digging while he should enjoy it, when over his head came sailing what he took for another flying squirrel. It sailed through the air just as noiselessly as any flying squirrel, but Tan noticed that it did some things he had never seen a

flying squirrel do. It seemed to sail along in a perfectly level line through the air, while the flying squirrels always sailed downward except for a little just before they alighted. And this one, instead of alighting on the trunk of a tree and scrambling up to the top for another leap, alighted directly on the top of a stake of the old rail fence, and sat perfectly still. It even seemed to stand upright on its hind feet so that it looked exactly like part of the fence stake, and not at all like a squirrel.

For a few breaths Tan sat perfectly still, more from habit when he saw anything that he did not fully understand than from any fear. Certainly it did not enter his little head that there was any danger from this little flying squirrel, as he thought it, though it did behave strangely. In another moment he would have gone on with his digging, when from the queer little figure on the fence stake floated out the weird, strange tremolo which, the first time he had heard it, he had mistaken for the laugh of a boy.

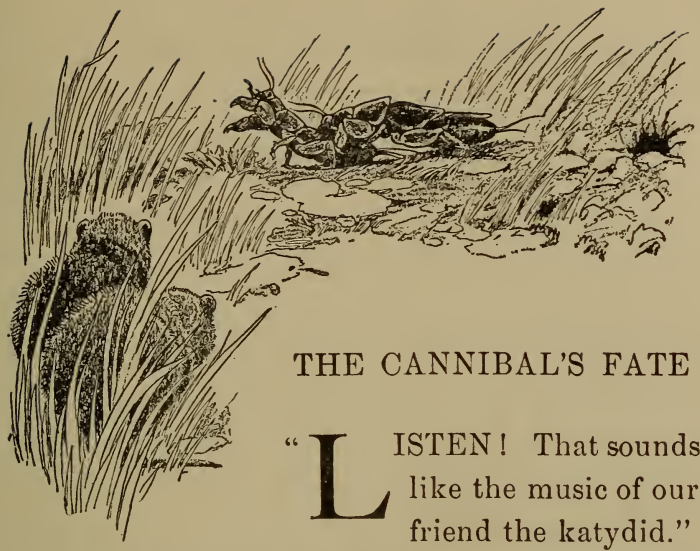
"TAN HAD NEVER HAD A MORE NARROW ESCAPE"

The screech owl! There it sat almost over his head, and he many a long leap from the old oak stump in which was safety. But Tan leaped. His nerves were so unstrung that he would have run, even if he had been many times as far from his nest, and had been quite in the open. It was not in mouse nature to hear that cry right over his head, and keep quiet. He leaped for the cover of the fence on which the owl sat. Luckily for him he remembered where was a hollow rail right on the ground, for he had often stopped there to rest on his way to and from the corn field across Pleasant Run.

Of course the moment he moved the owl both heard and saw him, and leaped directly down at him. But quick as the owl was he was not quick enough. Knowing exactly where was the knot-hole in the rail, Tan leaped inside. He barely got the tip of his tail out of reach when a little taloned foot grabbed at it. Tan had never had a more narrow escape.

The screech owl flew up on a dead snag

near by and laughed and laughed for a long time, and finally flew away. Not until long after Tan heard him calling from another part of the woodland did he venture to creep out and run home.



THE CANNIBAL'S FATE

"LISTEN! That sounds like the music of our friend the katydid."

It was rapidly growing dark, and Tan and Teckle were on their way back to the nest with their cheek pouches filled with grains of corn which they had gathered from the ground where the men had dropped it. The field-mice had crossed the stream of Pleasant Run on the old water gate, followed the worm fence to the corner of the field, and had there found plenty of grain which was theirs for the taking.

They stopped and listened intently—and a mouse's hearing is much more acute than a man's, or even a boy's.

"Cri-i-i-cri-i-cri, cri-i-i-cri-i-cri," came a shrill, monotonous chant from somewhere in the grass of the old fence row.

"That is not a katydid's music," whispered Teckle. "His sounded much more cheerful. This is like a complaint."

"Well, whatever it is," argued Tan, "the sound is made in the same way the katydid makes his music. That is not a song from the mouth."

Slowly, carefully, cautiously, the pair of little field-mice crept through the grass towards the spot where the musician seemed to be. But they were by no means agreed as to the direction or the distance. As in the case of the katydid, sometimes the music seemed a long way off, and sometimes right at hand; sometimes in one direction, sometimes another.

After much patient looking and listening here and there through the grass they came upon the musician. He was about the size of Cousin Gray, the dusty old grasshopper, before he was killed and eaten; but he was

much more plump, and instead of being gray he was quite black. He had the heavy hind legs of a jumper, but they were not so long as a grasshopper's. His feelers were very long—longer than all the rest of him together, just like a katydid's.

He sat in a little bare space which had been cleared of grass, and right beside him was a hole in the ground which the field-mice did not doubt was his nest, into which he would creep when he had done making music. They crept closer, but if he saw them he did not show it by any movement, either of fear or friendliness. He sat by his doorway and went on with his music.

As Tan and Teckle got quite near they saw that the musician was indeed making music just as the katydid had done. He raised up his wing covers as if he were about to fly, though they felt sure that he could never lift that fat body with such ridiculous little wings. They could see that he was making the music by moving the wing covers back and forth very rapidly. They were sure he must have

seen them, but he gave no heed to their presence.

"May you never be frightened," said Tan, politely.

"Cri-i-i-cri-i-cri" went on the music as if the black musician had not heard the salutation. Abashed, the field-mice drew back, but remained within sight. Presently, as they watched, another insect of the same kind but much smaller came into view. He crept from the grass into the little cleared space, raised his wing covers, and started to make music. But he scarcely had time to sound a feeble note when the first one rushed savagely upon him, and they began to fight. For a long time they rolled and struggled about the ground, but finally the larger one killed the other. Then, to the horror of Tan and Teckle, he began eating his victim right before their eyes. Terror-stricken, they ran home.

Next evening, before the bat was ready to fly forth from their old stump, they told him what they had seen.

"That was a mole cricket," he told them. "He is as cross as an owl all the time, and just as cruel. If he has a friend in all the woodland I do not know who it is. He eats his own brother, like a spider.

"Yes, that hole in the ground is his den. He has fore legs just like a mole's—you remember the mole that used to live here in the woodland, don't you? And like the mole, he digs in the ground. He makes a hole straight down for ever so far, and then makes runways all about under the ground. I have heard the farmer complain a great deal about mole crickets killing his vines by eating the roots.

"He eats anything he can get. I have often seen him kill and eat creatures smaller than himself. He eats grain, too, and the tender roots of plants. He is always hungry. I think it is a shame for man to call him the mole cricket merely because he digs in the ground, for the mole is such a quiet, well-behaved fellow, and not in the least quarrelsome.

"But never mind. This cricket will be climbing down into that hole for the winter as soon as the weather gets cold, and you will not see him any more until next spring."

The mole cricket was not destined to sleep that winter in his warm burrow, though nobody knew it then.

The bat told the wondering field-mice about several relatives of the mole cricket who are really pleasant to know. He had travelled so much, and had been about the farm-house and the barn as well as in the woods, and with the birds of the air as well as with the small wild folks of the ground and trees, that he knew many things which were hidden from the quiet, home-loving field-mice.

He told them of one kind of cricket that always lives close to the home of man. He digs his burrows beside the house walls, and is especially glad if he can make his nest near an oven that will keep him warm. Then he sings all winter long. And he very often

gets inside the house, and sits near the fire, and makes music which even man enjoys. Very seldom is the cricket molested when he chooses to live in the house, for he is a cleanly, cheerful little musician, meddles with nothing, and eats only the crumbs from the man's table.

The true house cricket is yellowish in colour, with brown markings, but there is a black field cricket which has the same fondness for the house of man, plays just as cheerful music, and is quite as welcome.

These little folk, too, live in burrows in the ground, or in chinks between the stones of chimneys and hearths, but they have none of the quarrelsome ways of the mole cricket. Like the katydid, only the male is able to make music, and the chief use of his tunes, aside from the pleasure it gives him, is to call his mate to him. After the mating season he seems to make music just for love of it.

"Does the cricket creep on his stomach and look like a worm when he is first hatched, as the butterfly does?" asked Teckle of the bat.

"Not he. When the cricket creeps from the egg he is very like what he is when full grown, only very small. But he soon remedies that difference, for he has a great appetite. He just eats and grows, and eats and grows, for that is all he has to do."

Teckle wanted to know whether the cricket has many enemies that hunt him and try to kill and eat him.

"Yes indeed! I should say that quite as many try to catch him as try to catch you—perhaps more. For you have not very many bird enemies, while even a sparrow can eat a cricket, and the great owl does not despise him because he is small. The cricket is really safe only when he is deep in his burrow, just as you are safe only in this solid old oak stump."

It was to be the fortune of Tan and Teckle to see several narrow escapes of the mole cricket, and finally to see his fate overtake him. They very often made trips to and from the old corn field, gathering grain and seeds from the ground, and it was seldom that

they passed his burrow without either seeing or hearing him, or both. They travelled mostly in the twilight of evenings or early mornings, and that was just the time the fat, black musician loved to sit beside his doorway and play.

One time when the field-mice were scurrying along the fence row they heard a tremendous pounding on the ground, and crouched under a fence rail and watched in terror, for they knew it must be the footsteps of some mighty animal. It was several young horses which had been turned into the field to exercise, and they were running and playing. Right over the spot where the cricket had been sitting and fiddling ran the great animals, neighing and kicking and romping. When they had passed nothing was to be seen of the cricket. Even the entrance to his tunnel had been blotted out. It seemed that one of the terrible hoofs had struck him and crushed him into the earth.

But next morning there he was, self-satisfied as ever, playing away beside his burrow.

He had just managed to get inside when a horse's hoof struck the entrance and crushed in so much of the upper part of the burrow that it took the cricket most of the night to open it.

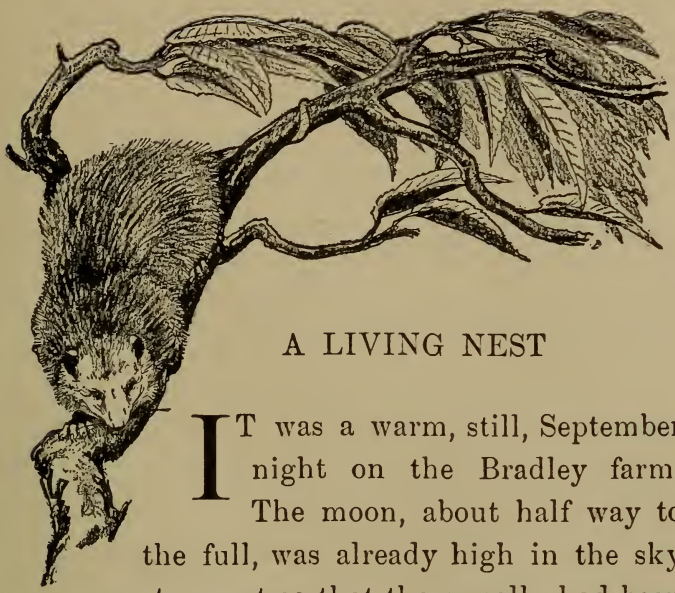
Again, soon after, the cricket was forced to flee in terror into his tunnel to save his life. A flock of robins had been gathering for days in the grove of sugar maples, planning their long journey to the south where they would spend the cold days of winter. They slept in the maples, but flew into the fields for food. That morning they were out long before sunrise. It was so chilly that the cricket should have been inside, but he had crawled forth and was waiting for the sun to warm him, when the robins came hurtling over the high fence. One of them spied the cricket and dropped down to get him. The cricket saw his danger, but he was chilled and stiff with the morning air, and was so slow getting into his burrow that the robin's beak actually touched one of his legs as he scurried inside.

The real tragedy came on another morning

before sunrise. The boys of the Bradley farm were concerned in it. They had a pet crow which was almost always with them, everywhere they went about the fields and woods. That morning they had an early errand in that part of the farm, and the crow was with them as usual, riding on top of a boy's head. It was lucky that Tan and Teckle had heard them coming and hid under a fence rail and kept perfectly still, for the crow's eyes and ears were keen as a cat's, and she would have caught and eaten them just as surely as a cat would.

When the boys were just opposite where the trembling mice lay hidden, the crow left the boy's head and flew to the top of a fence stake. She had no sooner alighted than she spied the great, fat, black mole cricket beside his burrow. The cricket saw his danger, too, and made a leap for his burrow just as the crow, with outspread wings, leaped to the ground to seize him. The cricket might have succeeded in getting away if he had not been so excited. But in his fear he leaped too hard, and struck

the ground so heavily that he rolled completely over, and before he could scramble to his feet the crow had him. She uttered a satisfied croak, and flew back to her perch on the crown of the boy's wide, straw hat.



A LIVING NEST

IT was a warm, still, September night on the Bradley farm. The moon, about half way to the full, was already high in the sky at sunset so that there really had been no darkness at all—just the exchange of bright sunlight for the mellow half-light of the moon. It was an ideal night for the little wild folks who love the twilight, and they were abroad by hundreds.

You would not have been aware of many of them, even if you had walked into that lonely corner of the farm, and had sat down to rest on the very stump that sheltered Tan and Teckle, the little field-mice. You would never have dreamed that those two bright-

eyed little creatures were in there, listening to all you did and trying to make out what you were about. You would never have known that just beneath the stump was the burrow of the muskrats whose ripples you might have seen as they swam and dived in Pleasant Run brook.

The great owl you might have heard while he was far away, but when he came near you would have thought, if you saw him at all, that he was part of the old dead tree on which he sat. You would never have believed how near to you the red fox walked when he had made sure that you had no dog along; nor how closely the old raccoon was eyeing you from the hollow of the box elder tree only a few rods distant.

No doubt you would have seen the bat flapping about overhead, for he cares not who sees him; but the pretty flying squirrels that sail down from tree to tree, to climb and sail away again, you would not have seen. They would have gone to another part of the wood when you appeared.

Night birds, night prowling animals, and insects that love the darkness would have looked at you, and listened to you, and studied you with their hundreds of pairs of eyes and ears all the while you imagined yourself utterly alone.

But if you had sat very, very still for a long, long time, and never moved nor made a sound, you might have witnessed a strange proceeding. For this is what happened:

Across the woodland from towards Nineveh creek came a creature about the size of a cat, but with shorter legs. Its long, sharp muzzle was held close to the ground, and its shiny, bead-like eyes glistened in the moonlight. It moved with an odd, ambling gait not at all like the lithe, sinuous, graceful movement of a cat. And its long tail, instead of being beautifully furred like a cat's, was bare and snaky. In colour this strange animal was grayish, with indefinite black markings showing in the light of the moon. Yes, it was an opossum.

Already he had eaten much, this opossum, but he was hunting for more. He had been up on the clay hills where grew the persimmon wild in the thickets, and although the season was early, and the frost had not fully ripened the fruit, he had found some soft enough to eat. He had found under the trees in the creek bottom an abundance of ripe hackberries, and had gorged himself on them though they were little more than seed and skin. Many an old, decaying log and stump he had explored, finding therein many a fat grub and beetle. Still he was hungry.

The opossum stopped and sniffed carefully at a scrub elm on which several clusters of dried leaves hung near the ground. He walked carefully around the tree, then began to climb it, slowly, noiselessly, and with extreme care. Up the trunk he went, and out one of the branches until he came to one of the thick clusters of dry leaves. Then there was a sudden movement, a mighty rustling of the leaves, and several hedge sparrows

"HE PRICKED UP HIS EARS AND LISTENED"

darted forth, fluttering and chattering in affright. One of them did not fly away. The opossum had caught him. Seated in the fork of the tree the greedy creature slowly ate his victim, while the chirping and complaining of the other birds gradually died away in the night as they found other roosting places and settled down.

When he had finished that part of his meal the opossum climbed down and started to hunt something else, for he was still hungry. He went down to the water's edge at Pleasant Run brook, and there found a minnow which a turtle had injured, and which had drifted helplessly against the bank. This he fished out of the water and ate.

While he was busy with this new dainty—for it was not often he tasted fish—he heard the barking of a dog far away, in the woods through which he had just come. He pricked up his ears and listened, but did not move away. He knew perfectly well what boys and dogs were, but he had often heard them in the woods at night and they had not yet

disturbed him. So he ate leisurely at his minnow, and finally finished it. By this time the dog was coming much nearer, and the opossum thought it wise to get out of the way, so he started on a queer, ambling run, to hide himself.

Across the shallow brook and up the other bank went the opossum, through the old worm fence, and along the bank of Pleasant Run towards Nineveh creek. He knew where to find a tall tree with a hole in it high up, if he but had time to reach it.

By this time the dog was barking by the hackberry tree where the opossum had eaten berries. Then, as he hurried, the opossum could hear him at the logs where he had eaten grubs; at the elm where he had caught the sparrow; at the spot where he had found the minnow; and finally over the fence and through the woodland right towards him. There was no longer room to doubt that the dog was trailing him. There was no time to reach the hollow tree; the best the opossum could do was to creep into a hollow, decayed

log, crawl as far back as he could, and lie still.

The dog, barking excitedly, followed the trail to the hollow log, thrust his muzzle in, sniffed eagerly, and set up a loud baying. He had located his prey. With shouts of joy the boys began chopping at the log with axes, and in a few moments the rotten, crumbling wood gave way, the opossum was exposed to view, and the dog leaped in and seized him.

Did the opossum turn on the dog with his keen teeth and defend his life? Not he. When he felt the dog's teeth he closed his eyes, stretched out his legs, let his jaw drop, stiffened his whole body, and seemed to be dead. After one or two vigorous shakes the dog dropped him to the ground and walked away. The dog looked with contempt on a foe which he thought he had killed so easily, but the boys only laughed at the dog. They were not deceived. They knew perfectly well that the opossum was not dead—not even hurt. He was only " playing

'possum"—pretending to be dead until they should go away, when he would scurry to his den.

"Let's see how long he'll keep it up," said one.

So they called the dog and started away, but went no farther than the trunk of a tree a few steps away. They hid behind it, held the dog, and kept perfectly still for several minutes, waiting for what they knew would happen. For a time the opossum lay as still as if he were really dead. Then his eyes opened. Next the gaping mouth closed and the head, with its beady eyes and keen nose, was lifted from the ground. Thinking the boys and dog were gone the opossum quickly scrambled to his feet and started to run. But the boys, with loud shouts of laughter, leaped from behind the tree and seized him by the scaly tail.

"Let's muzzle him. The last one nipped my leg," said the boy who was carrying him. So they placed a short stick crosswise in the opossum's mouth and tied his jaws fast upon

it with a string, and carried him away by the tail.

"We'll pen him up and feed him, and he'll be fat as a pig by Thanksgiving Day," they said.

They did pen him up and feed him, but they did not eat him when Thanksgiving Day came. They had not counted on their dog.

The opossum was kept under an inverted box with a heavy weight on it. The boys fed him with everything that even his appetite could demand. Fresh meat, pawpaws, persimmons, the heads, feet and entrails of chickens, and many strange foods which the opossum had never tasted before, but which he ate and relished. And assuredly he did wax fat. Of course he did not like being penned up, and often tried to gnaw or dig his way out, but he could not.

The dog did not approve of all this. He thought that opossums were made for boys and dogs to hunt and kill, and he spent much of his time trying to get at the prisoner. He

was continually prowling about that box, approaching it stealthily and dashing around it in the hope of surprising the opossum. His time came one dark night. Some person about the house had lifted the weight off the box, and the opossum found that he could move it. He was trying to get one side high enough to creep under it, when the dog espied him. With a mighty charge the dog threw his whole weight against the box, which the opossum was just lifting, and the result was that the box was turned entirely over. The dog seized the prisoner and shook him vigorously. The opossum did not struggle, and seemed to be very easily killed. The dog dropped him to the ground and looked him over. Yes, his eyes were closed, his mouth gaped open, his body stiff. He seemed quite dead, and the dog walked away, satisfied at last.

Half an hour later a very fat and well pleased opossum, with a half grown chicken in his mouth, was ambling as fast as his short legs would carry him, through the sugar maple grove towards the woodland. He

stopped half-way and made a meal off the chicken, wandered about until daybreak, and began to look for a place to sleep away the day.

So it was that Tan and Teckle, coming home after a ramble abroad for food, found a strange animal sleeping in their hollow stump. And so it was that the bat, tired and sleepy after a night on the wing, creeping into the stump for a day's sleep, scrambled out again chattering with rage, and was compelled to sleep that day in a hollow tree. The mice kept out of the way in the muskrat's burrow beneath their stump, and when night came on again the opossum climbed out and went on his way.

The bat was still in bad humour when he came home to the stump the next morning.

"The great, fat pig!" he exclaimed—first taking care to see that the opossum was not inside. "The glutton! It is a pity they did not eat him—I wish they had."

The bat knew all about the opossum's adventure with the boys.

"His family is old, but he hasn't any manners for all that. He has had all the food he could stuff into his greedy mouth for many suns. Yet the moment he is free he kills the farmer's chicken, and he makes a trail here for the boys and dog to follow and make us trouble. And if he could have caught you and me he would have eaten all of us. I'm sorry he ever got away."

"What do you mean by his family being old?" inquired Teckle. "Have they lived in this woodland so much longer than the rest of us?"

"Not exactly that. But the opossum is a form of life that was among the first of the four-footed land animals. The young are very small, and blind and helpless when they are born. The mother picks them up and puts them into a pouch underneath her body, and carries them about with her until they are almost grown. She is a living nest for them, and takes them with her always."

"How nice that must be!"

"Perhaps so. But I wish they'd stay in

their own part of the woodland. They're greedy, they eat meat as well as fruit and everything else, and this one has angered the farmer and come here to sleep and bring down danger on us."

And the bat chattered and squeaked until it was broad daylight and he fell asleep in spite of himself.

THE MINNOW

AS they went and came about their work or play on these pleasant autumn days, Tan and Teckle always enjoyed stopping on the bank of the brook of Pleasant Run to watch the minnows. They knew very little about these tiny fish, but they loved to watch them because they always seemed so happy, so free from care, and so playful. There were a great many schools of minnows in the little creek, and every time one of the little field-mice happened along the bank, they were to be seen darting rapidly about the riffles, or leap-

ing into the air from the pools, or lying idly near the surface in the sunshine.

"Surely," thought Tan and Teckle, "the life of these little creatures is all ease and pleasure. They have neither to seek for food, nor hide from danger; for their food is brought to them by the stream, and nothing can go into the water to catch them. They must be the happiest of all the little wild people, for they have less to worry them than any of the rest of us."

Tan made some such remark to the bat one evening, after a particularly trying day. Very early in the morning Tan had a narrow escape from a large water-snake. Several times crows, gathering for their winter convention, had hunted in flocks across that part of the woodland, and Tan was forced to hide. Then more than one hawk, hunting singly and by stealth, had driven Tan to cover. So the day had been full of alarms, and when the little field-mouse went out in the evening he was actually run over and trampled upon by a rabbit, fleeing wildly from some unseen foe,

bruising him a little and frightening him very much. And on his way back to the old stump he had been compelled to creep into a hollow fence rail and lie there for a long, long time, while the great owl hooted and hooted almost above his head.

As he finally scampered across the old water gate, Tan could see the school of minnows playing in the shallow water in the moonlight, rippling the surface as they raced about, and sometimes making a tiny splash as one leaped clear of the water. Tan thought their peaceful life so happy in contrast to his own that he spoke to the bat about it.

"If you want to learn a lesson, little brother," said the bat, "go to the creek bank to-morrow and spend as much of the day there as you can, and watch the minnows. Just keep out of sight and watch, and in the evening tell me what you think."

Tan thought that perhaps he was to learn the secret of the happy and peaceful life of the minnows; so very, very early next morning, long before sunrise, he left the nest in the

old hollow stump and made his way to the water's edge. He did not go outside and climb down the steep bank, but crept down through the hollow tap root of the stump, and went through the muskrat's tunnel. The mouth of this tunnel was right at the edge of the water, and the entrance was so well concealed by grass that Tan could sit with his feet in the water and see all that happened, and yet remain unseen.

Tan, accustomed to the night as well as the day, could see the minnows swimming about, feeding on tiny insects and bits of vegetable matter in the water. The sun was just beginning to brighten the clouds in the east when some movement on the bank seemed to alarm the minnows, for the whole school swam towards the farther side of the brook, where stood something which Tan thought was part of the root of an old stump, washed down the stream in time of high water. It looked perfectly natural, although Tan did not remember having seen it there before. The minnows swam straight towards it, but the moment

they were within reach the upper part of the old root shot into the water as quick as thought. Then the old piece of stump, as Tan had thought it, rose from the water and on broad, flapping wings, flew swiftly up the stream, with long, slender legs trailing out behind, and long beak, grasping a minnow, thrust far out in front.

"Skyounk! Skyounk!" cried a hoarse voice as the little green heron flapped around the bend in the creek and disappeared.

The minnows darted back into deeper water when the heron seized their playfellow, and for a moment were very quiet. Then they came forth and began playing about in the shallows as if nothing had happened.

Next Tan saw a beautiful bird coming down the creek, flying with rapid wing strokes. Tan had often seen this bird, but knew nothing of him. He was larger than a robin, but blue and white in colour like a jay, and with even a larger crest than any jay. As he flew he uttered a loud, rasping cry, more like the

clattering together of pieces of wood than any sound made by a voice.

As this handsome bird flew over them the minnows seemed greatly disturbed, and fled into the deeper water again. But when the bird perched on a dead limb overhanging the water, and sat perfectly still, it was but a little time until they came forth again and began to play about the shallows. Then Tan saw the bird drop from his perch and dart head first, at great speed, into the water. He came forth immediately, scattering from his feathers the shining drops of water, and uttering his rasping cry, and flew back around the bend of the creek with a minnow in his beak. Tan had seen the hunting of the great kingfisher.

Again the school of minnows fled in terror, and again their terror was over in a moment, and they had forgotten all danger and were playing and feeding as before. This time they were attracted to the side of the stream where Tan was hiding. They came slowly across the little stream, playing, leaping over

each other, several of them rising to the surface to catch the midges that fell on the water. When they were so near that Tan could have reached them with a single short leap, there shot out from the grass right beside him the flat head and long, sinuous body of the very water-snake that had tried to catch him the day before. This time the snake did not fail in his stroke, and Tan saw him swim to the bank, climb out of the water, and swallow alive the minnow he had just caught.

Again frightened for the moment, the school darted up stream a short distance to where there was a deeper pool, with soft, oozy bottom. They had been there but a few breaths when they came rushing madly forth; and from the muddiness of the water, and the size of the ripples circling from the pool, Tan judged that some enemy had attacked them under water. A little later he saw a small mud turtle crawl from the water to the top of a log beside the bank, and go to sleep with the satisfied air of one who has just had a good meal.

By this time the sun was rising. In the bright reflection of the rays Tan saw long lines of ripples from some creature swimming up the stream. At first he thought it was the muskrat, coming home to his burrow for a day's sleep. Apparently the minnows thought so too, for they did not flee as if they knew him for an enemy, and they knew well that they had nothing to fear from the muskrat, who eats only roots, fruit and vegetables. They merely veered a little to one side and went on their way. But instead of passing them by, when he was right abreast of the school the animal lowered his head, dived with all the quickness and grace of a muskrat, and when he came up he held in his teeth the largest minnow of all. It was not the muskrat at all, but a mink!

Out of the water stepped the mink, the minnow in his teeth, his head held high. He stopped for a moment and stood motionless, listening. Then he stole swiftly and silently up the steep bank and disappeared. He had seen, or smelled, or heard some danger. Tan,

too, heard an unwonted sound, pricked up his ears and listened. The three boys of the Bradley farm were coming. Tan was well hidden, he had at his back the muskrat's tunnel through which to flee in case of danger, and he felt safe to sit where he was. The boys came down into the water almost opposite where Tan was concealed. They unfolded a small net, and drew it rapidly through the water, and when they lifted it they had almost half the school of minnows in its meshes. The boys were going fishing, and wanted live minnows to bait their hooks. True, they threw back into the water all but the largest, but when they had gone, even Tan could see that there were not nearly as many minnows as there had been.

Tan had seen enough. It was barely sunrise, yet already that morning he had seen more enemies after the minnows than he had ever believed they had in the world. He ran back through the muskrat's tunnel, crept up through the long, hollow tap root of the stump, and was safe in his own nest again.

"Mother Nature makes them just for that," remarked the bat when Tan told him what he had witnessed. "Minnows seem to live just to supply larger fish with food. That is why they multiply so rapidly. Each female lays hundreds of eggs, and unless they are eaten, nearly all the eggs hatch. From the time the minnows leave the egg they are food for all manner of meat eaters. Larger fish eat them all the time, and you have seen some of their other enemies. But Mother Nature makes them multiply so rapidly that there is no danger that they will all be eaten, and she gives them short memories so that they do not worry long about anything that troubles them."

After that Tan was always ready to believe that his own lot was by no means the worst in life, and that even the little wild people who seem happiest have quite as many worries as he.

AN UNPLEASANT NEIGHBOUR

THE day had been beautifully sunny and mild, a perfect autumn day. There had been no strong wind to bring an odour from afar, yet as Tan and Teckle, the little field-mice, sat in the doorway of their old hollow oak stump and sniffed the evening breeze it was not pleasant. They could not understand the taint in it.

"It is as offensive as the odour of something long dead," said Tan, "but it is different."

"It is like the odour of a meat eater, only many times stronger," replied Teckle. "I feel sure it is some strange animal."

Just then their cousin the bat, who had finished his day's sleep in the hollow of their

stump, scrambled to the top ready for his evening flight.

"That is a skunk," he declared, after one sniff at the tainted air. "An arrant thief, and quarrelsome, too. He has been having trouble; that is why he smells so badly just now. I am sorry one has come into our woodland, for his presence always means trouble. It would be just like him to get the farmer after him, and then hide in our stump as the opossum did."

The bat had spent so many days in the old hollow stump where the mice lived that he now called it "our stump."

The field-mice joined heartily in the bat's wish that the skunk might move out of the woodland as quickly as possible. They remembered with mortification how the opossum had once lain in their stump all day while they had to hide away from their own nest. But it would be much more unpleasant to have such an ill-smelling creature as the skunk in the place, and especially if the farmer came hunting him.

"Is he very like the opossum?" they asked the bat.

"In being a thief, yes; and in going where he is not wanted, yes; but he does not look like the opossum, and his ways are not the same, and above all he does not smell like an opossum. The skunk digs a burrow in the earth like the fox instead of living in a hollow tree like the opossum. He is about the size of the opossum, but looks more like a cat—indeed the farmer calls him a polecat. And instead of the naked, snaky tail of the opossum, the skunk has a great, bushy one which he carries over his back like a squirrel. And in colour he is black, with white stripes lengthwise along his sides."

"Why does he smell so ill? Is it because he eats creatures that have been a long time dead?"

"He smells like that only when he chooses. That is his method of fighting. Near his tail he has two little sacs in which he carries a liquid which makes this odour. When he is angered he turns his tail towards his enemy,

lifts his tail out of the way, and sprays out this liquid upon whoever has offended him. It makes one deathly sick."

"That is as queer a way of getting rid of an enemy as the opossum's," remarked Teckle. "I remember you told us that he pretends to be dead until his enemy goes away, when he runs and hides."

"It is much more like the old turkey buzzard," ventured Tan. "He once told me that when he is angered his only way of fighting is to disgorge his food upon his enemy. And as he always eats creatures that have been dead a long time it must be very unpleasant."

"The skunk is much worse than either," said the bat. "Let's hope he doesn't bring the farmer down here hunting him," was his parting remark as he flew away for the night.

But the skunk did come very near to doing that very thing. He was a great thief, as the bat had said. He lived mostly on birds and small animals, but instead of being satisfied with what he could catch for himself he would go to the farmhouse and carry off

chickens. Several times he took hens that were roosting outside the poultry-house, and was not detected. Then he grew bolder, and one night he got into the poultry-house and carried away one of the farmer's prize hens.

Even then, if he had moved far away, and kept at a distance from the farmhouse, he might have escaped. But now that the farmer knew some creature was stealing his hens he would watch. The boys of the Bradley farm set traps, and one night they caught the thief by one toe; but he struggled so hard, and the trap had so small a hold on him, that he finally pulled himself loose, but not until he had emitted a great deal of spray and made such a stench that it could be smelled a long way off.

Still the skunk did not learn prudence, but kept on coming after chickens instead of hunting for himself. So it was no wonder that one night he got into trouble. He found a hen roosting on the fence away from the poultry-house—two hens in fact. He crept up and seized one very deftly by the neck so

"HE FOUND A HEN ROOSTING ON THE FENCE AWAY FROM THE POULTRY-HOUSE—TWO HENS IN FACT"

that she made no sound or struggle. But the other hen was frightened, and set up such a squalling that not only did the dogs come barking to learn what was the trouble, but the farmer and the boys came running to catch the marauder.

By dropping the hen and running with all his might, weaving in and out through fences, and when he got into the sugar grove creeping through log heaps and underbrush, the skunk kept out of sight of the dogs and safe from immediate capture. But he left a trail that no dog could miss, and soon the boys were after him, their dogs baying on the scent.

After a devious journey, to give the dogs more trouble to follow him, the skunk came to the open bit of woodland where dwelt Tan and Teckle. He knew that the dogs were rapidly gaining on him, and he must find some shelter. Tan and Teckle, standing in the doorway of one of the hollow roots leading into their stump, saw him coming directly towards them in the early morning light.

They knew him instantly, from the description the bat had given.

Although he was travelling as rapidly as he could, the skunk was not leaping with all four feet off the ground at once, nor galloping, nor even trotting as a fox or a dog would have done. His gait was more like the peculiar amble of the opossum, and he planted the flat sole of his feet on the ground like the raccoon. It seemed a very slow pace for one in danger of his being caught by the dogs, but it was the best the skunk could do.

The strange animal came straight for the old oak stump as if he had known it was hollow and could give him shelter. The field-mice shrank back out of reach, but still watched. Right up to the stump he came, sniffed at the hollow root, and even tried it with one paw as if to see whether he could enlarge the hole and creep in. But the doorway was too small, and time was pressing. So around the stump he went, trying all the doorways. He even looked up at the top as if tempted to climb up and see if there were

not a hole in the top large enough to admit him—as indeed there was. But he decided that he had not time, for the baying of the dogs was heard close at hand by this time. So he turned and ambled away just as the dogs came into view on his trail.

Then Tan and Teckle witnessed a strange combat. As the dogs saw him and rushed savagely at him the skunk showed no fear, but stopped and coolly awaited them. When they were but a few leaps away he turned his tail towards them, lifted it carefully out of the way, and sent forth a cloud of fine spray. The foremost dog was not stopped by this, but dashed blindly in, seized the skunk, and in spite of a severe bite on the lip, gave a tremendous grip with his teeth, and a hard shake. Then he loosened his hold, ran away a few paces, and fell writhing to the ground and lay there, retching and groaning, and deathly sick.

The second dog also rushed in and seized the skunk, giving it a hard grip with his jaws and a hearty shake. But he, too, was over-

come by the odour, and lay in the grass, rolling and moaning as the other did.

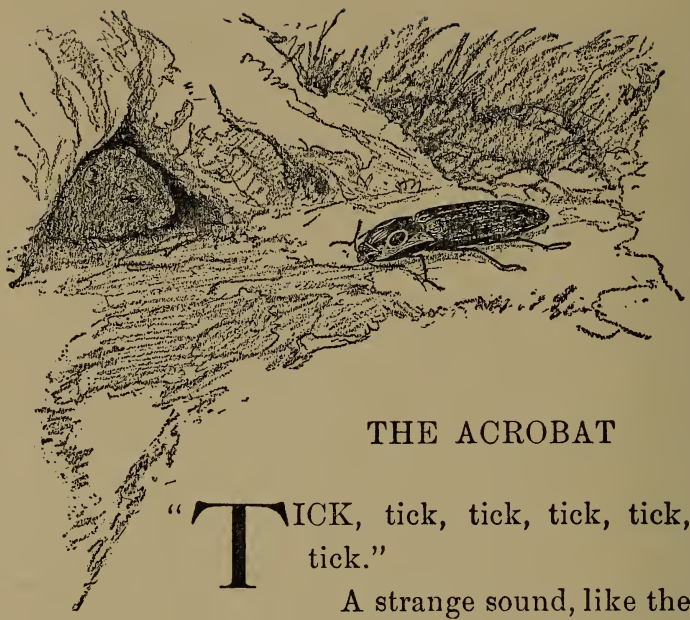
By this time the air was reeking with the stench. Tan and Teckle could scarcely bear it, yet they sat still and watched what happened. They heard cries, and presently they saw the three boys of the Bradley farm running, and heard their shouts, their commands to the dogs to come away. The dogs were quite ready to come. The boys had not meant the dogs to seize the skunk, but merely to follow him and see where he should hide. They meant to dig him out and shoot him. In obedience to their calls the dogs crept away and did not try to seize the skunk, which by this time was ambling away. But one of the boys carried a gun, and presently there roared through the woodland what the little wild folks call the "thunder that kills," and the skunk lay dead in the grass.

For many and many a day the carcass of the skunk lay there in the woodland and polluted the fresh air. Tan and Teckle were always sorry to see any creature killed, but

they had to agree with the bat that the skunk had in a measure deserved his fate. Instead of being satisfied with the food he could find for himself he had stolen the fowls which the farmer had grown.

There were other evil results of the skunk's visit which later became apparent. The bat told the field-mice that the farmer had been compelled to shoot one of his dogs. The one which had been bitten by the skunk went mad, and if not killed would have gone about biting animals and men, and each one bitten would in his turn have gone mad.

"Nobody seems to know why the skunk's bite should cause madness, but it certainly does," concluded the bat. "I think we are very lucky to escape all harm ourselves. Suppose he had hidden in our stump that morning when the boys came hunting him. I told you his presence always meant trouble for everybody. Let's hope another one never comes here."



THE ACROBAT

"TICK, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick."

A strange sound, like the clicking together of some little creature's teeth, was heard in the old hollow oak stump in which lived Tan and Teckle, the little field-mice. There was no sign of any animal near, no cries of rage or pain, and they had never seen an animal which made a steady clicking noise with his teeth and kept on doing it indefinitely. The sound seemed to come from the same place, neither coming nearer nor going farther away.

At first the field-mice were alarmed, but

after a time they were no longer afraid, and crept about in the old stump, trying to discover what made the sound, and where it was. Their seeking was without result. The sound seemed to come from the solid shell of the stump, and they could hear it as well from one place as another.

Finally they gave up the search. They forbore to ask the bat about it in the evening when he awoke and flew forth for his dinner, for the sound had then ceased. But in the night they heard it again for a long time, ticking away steadily. Again they took up the search, and finally, almost by accident, they came upon a queer little beetle clinging to the inside of the stump, and striking his head against the hard wood with great force for such a little fellow. He worked very steadily, and they could hear the "tick, tick, tick," very clearly every time he struck. They had found him.

As they looked the little fellow ceased knocking his head, and for several breaths he stood quite motionless and silent. Then he

began as before, "tick, tick, tick," as if he had work to do. The mice could not see that he was either getting food or making a hole in the wood for a nest, and what else he could possibly be about they could not guess.

Again the little beetle paused and stood motionless. This time, faint and far, from some other part of the stump, sounded an answering "tick, tick, tick." The mystery was solved. The beetle had been calling for a mate, and she had answered his call.

"Oh, yes, I know him well—very well indeed—quite well," said the bat next evening when they told him of their discovery. "Would you ever believe that man is more afraid of that little beetle than you are?"

"How is that possible? I thought that man is not afraid of anything!"

"He is afraid of many things, and that tiny creature is one of them. I know, for I used to sleep in the barn near the farmhouse, and I have heard men talk. They call the little beetle a death watch, and when they hear him they are afraid, for they think that his ticking

is a sign that some person in the house will die soon. Even you are braver than the men, for you are not afraid. As for me, I consider the beetle good eating."

"What! Do you kill and eat the poor beetle?"

"Why not? I must live, and to live I must eat. There are plenty of creatures that would eat me if they could catch me."

It was the old, old problem of life—the strong preying on the weak, and they in turn preying on those still weaker. Tan and Teckle could never quite agree that it was right, yet it was good old Mother Nature's law, and she could not be wrong.

"This beetle has a big cousin who makes a similar noise, but he does it in a different way, and only when he needs to," the bat told them. "You will see him some time. His legs are so short and weak that when he falls on his back he cannot turn over. He is more helpless than the mud turtle—or would be, if he had not invented a way to turn over."

The mice did see the strange spring beetle, or skipjack, very soon. One day the three boys of the Bradley farm came into the woodland, and sat down against that very stump to rest. For a wonder their dogs were not with them—perhaps because they still carried the odour of the skunk, and were not pleasant company. The mice thought that the boys had come hunting them, and were greatly alarmed, but after a little while they found that the boys were not even thinking of them. At first Tan and Teckle hid away in the inmost recesses of the hollow stump, but by and by when they found that they were not molested they ventured down where they could see what the boys were doing. They were examining some creature that they had caught, and were much interested.

"Put him on his back on this piece of bark," said one. After a moment the mice heard a click very like that made by the death watch.

"Lay him with his head lower than his body and see if he can do it," said another

boy. Then, after a pause, were heard two clicks.

"He can do it on wood almost every time," said a boy. "Now try him in the soft dirt at the foot of the stump. That will not be so easy."

And in the loose dirt right at the doorway into the old hollow stump, a boy laid down a very large beetle. He was dark gray in colour, with tiny mottlings of white; and on the place where his shoulders would have been if beetles had shoulders, were two great, densely black spots, round, with white edges, and looking like immense eyes. Its body was large, long and thick, but its legs were very short and ridiculous.

The boy laid the beetle carefully on his back in the loose dirt, and left him there. For a moment he lay still, his legs waving impotently in the air as he reached about and tried in vain to lay hold on something that would help him to turn over and get on his feet. Then he ceased to struggle, pushed his head and thorax, or fore part of his body,

far back as if they were hinged, and brought them down with a powerful snap. The beetle's body quivered, but did not turn over. Again and again he lifted his head and thorax as far back as he could reach, then brought them into place again, until finally his body bounded just a little from the earth, and he turned partly on one side. Then he got a partial foothold and was soon on his feet.

Then the boy placed the beetle on his back on a piece of wood. He clawed the air feebly for a moment; then, realizing that there was nothing for him to lay hold of, he folded up his legs against his body, drew back his head and thorax, and gave a tremendous snap that lifted him into the air and sent him spinning over and over. He alighted on his feet and started to crawl away. The mice expected to see the boys catch him again and perhaps kill him, but they did nothing of the kind.

"Let him go," said one. "He's performed enough for to-day."

So the beetle crept into the old hollow

stump, and quickly hid himself in the litter of decayed wood at the bottom. They often heard him of nights afterwards rustling about in the rubbish, and they sometimes saw him, but they never disturbed him. He used sometimes to go out and fly about, especially in the evenings, but always came back to the stump.

If the mice were surprised that the boys allowed the beetle to go unharmed, they were much more surprised at the next thing that happened. The boys remained beside the old stump, but after a habit of theirs they kept so quiet that the little wild creatures began to be less afraid, and some of them actually forgot that the boys were there. The muskrat swam and dived in the brook before their very eyes, the little green heron flew down the stream from around the bend and began fishing for minnows close to them, and even Tan and Teckle began to run in and out of the hollow roots of the stump.

Finally, forgetting the presence of the boys, Teckle ran around the stump to where they

sat. One of the boys made a quick movement of his hand, a movement so rapid and so slight that even the heron did not perceive it, and Teckle was a prisoner. Wild-eyed and panting, her eyes starting from her head with terror, she was lifted from the ground and held up so that all might see her. Surely, she thought, now she was to be put to death.

"Look!" said the boy under his breath to the others. "It's a poor little mother mouse, and her babies aren't born yet. She's scared 'most to death—see how her heart beats."

"Don't hurt her—let her go," said one. And to Teckle's amazement, instead of being dashed to death, she was set gently on the ground and allowed to run back into the stump again.

"Truly, you never know what to expect from those boys," said the bat when he was told of Teckle's capture and release. "I have seen them kill mice in the barn—more in one day than I have claws on all my feet many times over. I have seen them in the evenings take fish from the water with sharp hooks.

I have seen them kill, and kill, and kill. And then, at times, they refuse to harm even the weakest of us. I wonder what they would do with me if they should catch me."

THE MOURNFUL SINGER

FOR a long time Tan and Teckle had heard, at intervals, the song of a very mysterious neighbour, but they had never seen him. They knew the name that man has given him, for they asked the bat the very first time they heard his weird night call; but they neither liked nor understood the name, so they called him a name of their own—the mournful singer.

They never heard his song by day, nor for a long time after sunset, and it always ceased long before daybreak. It was only when the night was darkest, and in the most gloomy depths of the woods, that he lifted his voice.

It must have been a song of pleasure—most likely a love song, as most real songs are; but to Tan and Teckle it always sounded very mournful, though perhaps this was because it was always heard when the night was dark and still, and it seemed so far away in the depths of the dense woods.

If it had not been for the three boys of the Bradley farm Tan and Teckle might never have learned of one of the queer habits of the mournful singer, nor how near a neighbour he was. The little field-mice were out for food late in the afternoon of a very warm autumn day, when they heard human beings in the woodland. It was the three boys on their way home after a hunt for ripe paw-paws in the creek bottoms. They were coming up the creek bank, and unless they turned aside they would pass very near to where Tan and Teckle were gathering food. So the mice crept under a fallen branch of a tree and lay quiet until they should leave. The boys came trooping along in Indian file, one behind the other, making very little noise, and

watching and listening for what they might see or hear of the little wild people.

Just when the boys were passing the spot where the field-mice lay hidden, and in another breath would have been gone, there tumbled into the dry leaves just before them what seemed to be a piece from the old rotten log beside the path. It rolled over on the dead leaves, and went bobbing along just in front of them with a most irregular motion.

"Whippoorwill!" exclaimed the foremost boy as they all three stopped and looked. And Tan and Teckle could see that it was, indeed, a bird, about the size of the sparrow hawk, but of a very curious colour. It was a mingling of dark brown with black markings and even tiny white splotches which made it resemble a piece of wood with the bark on it. The neck and legs were very short, but the wings and tail large.

The poor bird seemed to be badly injured, and Tan and Teckle thought the boys must have stepped on it, for it sprawled helplessly on the ground, one wing hanging as if bro-

ken, while it fluttered pitifully along in front of the boys. The field-mice expected to see the boys give chase and kill the poor, crippled bird.

In their earlier days in the woods the boys might have been deceived into chasing such a bird, but they had learned their lesson. They knew perfectly well that this was a mother bird pretending to be injured so that they would give chase, and she would lead them away from her eggs or young, which were probably very near. Many birds have this trick, and the boys had been duped often when they were younger. But this time they did not pursue the fluttering bird. They stood stock still and looked for the young birds which they felt sure were near.

"Eggs! See them, there by the old log," exclaimed one boy. Sure enough, there were two eggs of white and brown, oddly mottled and looking very like pieces of the dead wood that lay about. "Not a sign of a nest, either," remarked another boy. It was true. The eggs lay among the leaves on the decaying

bits of wood, with not even a little depression to hold them.

When the boys had watched the antics of the mother bird for a time, they walked over and picked up the eggs. All the while they examined them the mother bird fluttered about their feet, looking up piteously at them with large, dark eyes, but never uttering a sound. It seemed that the boys at any moment could have stooped and picked her up, and they certainly could have struck her with a stick, but they merely watched her, and made no effort to harm her. When they had finished looking at the eggs, they laid them carefully on the ground and went on their way.

The mother bird flew instantly to her eggs, and stood over them, looking to see whether they had been injured. She made a queer, crooning kind of call, and her mate came flying to her, keeping very close to the ground. He alighted by her side, and for a moment they stood together over the eggs. Then they did a very astonishing thing. Each bird took

an egg into its enormous mouth, and together they flew away into the depths of the woods. Tan and Teckle had seen many a four-legged mother move her little ones by carrying them in her mouth, but this was the first time they had ever seen a bird do it.

"Yes, I have seen the whippoorwills do that," said the bat when they told him what they had witnessed. "They never build a nest, but the mother bird lays her eggs in the leaves in the darkest part of the woods, usually beside an old log."

"Those birds look like owls, except their eyes," remarked Teckle. "Do they catch and eat creatures as owls do?"

"They eat nothing but insects, just as I do," replied the bat. "They fly by night as the owl does, and they see by night as well as the owl, and they never sing but in the middle of the night; but they are very weak and defenseless, and not at all like owls in their way of living. They are much better behaved than owls."

"I think it must have been the whippoor-

will that we saw all through the summer, flying about in flocks in the evenings catching insects," ventured Tan, "but they flew by day sometimes, and I plainly heard them calling 'sprake! sprake!' many times. And they used to fly very high, and then dive down almost to the ground and make a very strange, booming sound."

"They were not whippoorwills at all," declared the bat. "The whippoorwill never flies by day unless disturbed, never sings by day, never sings on the wing, and does not fly in flocks. It keeps close to the ground, and often alights, flying but a little way at a time. The birds you saw are bigger and stronger, and fly evenings and cloudy days, and sometimes in the sunlight. Often they come out in great flocks when a storm is rising. Men call them goatsuckers, from a very foolish belief that they take milk from goats. They also call them night-hawks, nightjars, and even bullbats—as if they are at all like a bat!"

"They do fly evenings, and they do eat insects."

"Well, does that make them bats? They wear feathers instead of hair, they lay eggs instead of bringing forth their young alive, they have beaks instead of teeth—oh, it's foolish to try to tell all the differences! They are only birds."

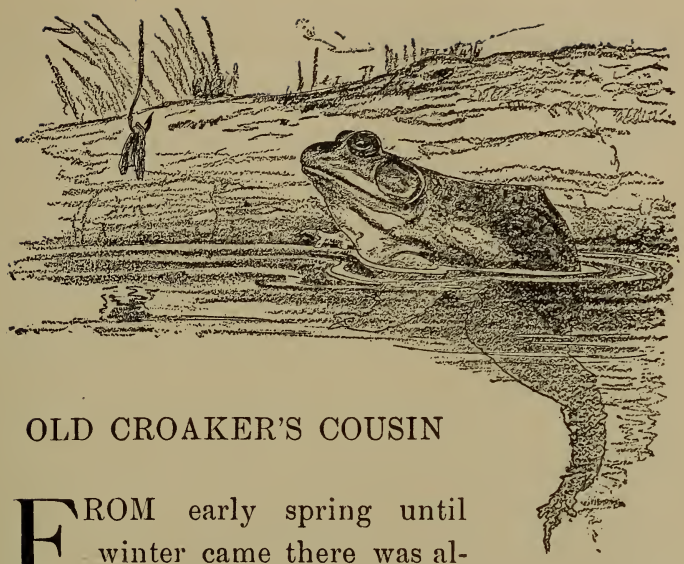
"It is very strange," mused Teckle, "that they had their nest so very near our stump and we never guessed it—never even saw one of them, and never heard them sing close at hand."

"Not very strange unless you had been out in the darkest part of the night looking for them. They are very shy, and make almost no noise at all, especially near their eggs. By day they sit very still, and most of the time are sound asleep. As to their living near you, they may have brought those eggs here only a day or two ago. Whenever anything disturbs a whippoorwill's eggs they move. I have even heard that they will take their young ones in their great mouths and fly away with them if they are in danger, but I have never seen them do that."

"Does the nightjar make the same kind of a nest?"

"Yes, much the same kind of a nest—only it oughtn't to be called a nest, for it isn't. Instead of a dark, damp place such as the whippoorwill likes, the nightjar chooses a dry, sunny place. The mother bird lays her eggs on the ground, usually where it is rocky; and the eggs are brown and white, just like the mottled pebbles, so that they can hardly be found at all.

"Maybe that is as good a way as any, and it certainly saves the whippoorwill time and trouble when she wants to move, but somehow I always like to see a bird take pains with a nest, like the oriole or the barn swallow or the robin."



OLD CROAKER'S COUSIN

FROM early spring until winter came there was always music in the woodlands of the old Bradley farm. Day or night there was seldom a moment when one could not hear some little wild creature. Birds and locusts and grasshoppers and squirrels sang or fiddled or barked by day, and owls and whippoorwills and toads and frogs and katydids and scores of others did their part by night. And, among them all, they kept up one long concert from one sunset to another.

Until one warm night in early fall Tan and Teckle had thought that the music of all

frogs and toads was confined to chirps and trills. They had seen the myriads of green and brown frogs that sat among the grass and reeds and rushes along the creek bank and shrilled forth their calls. They had often watched Old Croaker, the fat toad who usually slept away the day in the shelter of a hollow root leading into their stump—they had listened with admiration when he lifted his shrill, tremolo voice and joined in the chorus. This, they thought, was the extent of the musical ability of that family.

But one evening when they were playing back and forth between the home stump and the bank of Pleasant Run, they heard from away down Nineveh creek a deep, hoarse, rumbling call that they had noticed more than once in the summer but had never inquired about. Now it seemed much nearer than they had ever heard it before, and they stopped to listen, while Old Croaker trilled away at his evensong.

"Gro-o-o-om! Gro-o-o-o-om!"

The voice boomed and boomed away at

short intervals, and it seemed to the field-mice like the noise made by the bulls in the woodland pasture.

"What creature is that?" inquired Tan of Old Croaker. "It must be one of the farmer's big animals, it makes so much noise."

"Not a bit bigger than I am," replied Old Croaker. "Not a bit."

The great toad went on with his song, but Tan and Teckle were curious, and not satisfied with so brief an answer.

"I don't understand how he can have such a deep, deep voice and make such a loud noise if he is so small," objected Teckle.

"I'm not small. I'm a very fair size—a very fair size, indeed. And I ought to know whether that fellow is the bigger. He's my cousin."

"What do you call him? Are you sure he is no bigger than you?"

"Not a bit bigger—well, it may be a trifle longer than I am, but certainly not so plump. I'm quite sure he's not so noble in girth as I. His name? They call him the bullfrog.

That's because he bawls out like a bull with that awful voice of his."

"Is he fierce? Is he dangerous? Is he a meat eater?" demanded Tan and Teckle, both talking at once.

"I believe he would eat you if you happened in his way," replied Old Croaker reflectively. Since he had been eaten himself, and had lived to tell of it, Old Croaker talked a bit too freely about being eaten, the little field-mice thought. But they were trying to learn about this new neighbour the bullfrog, and they held their peace. Old Croaker went on:

"No, he's not fierce. He couldn't well be fierce, for he has no weapons to fight with, any more than I have. He can neither bite, nor sting, nor scratch, nor stab with quills, nor even throw ill-smelling scent on an enemy."

"Then how does he catch creatures to eat? Didn't you say he is a meat eater?" demanded Tan.

"I didn't say he is a meat eater, but he is —in a way. He eats whatever he can catch,

"SHE BROUGHT HER LITTLE ONES DOWN FOR THEIR FIRST SWIM"

but it is chiefly insects, slugs, snails, and such. But I did see him, once, eat a duckling."

"How terrible!" exclaimed Teckle.

But instead of thinking it terrible, Old Croaker seemed actually proud that his cousin with the powerful voice could manage a duckling, so he went on with the story:

"It was right here in this stream of Pleasant Run, too. My cousin—the very one you hear down there now—had come up here with his mate in the spring to find a nice, still pool for her eggs. A little, wild, summer duck had a nest back in the reeds, and it happened that she brought her little ones down for their first swim the very morning that the frogs came up the stream. The mother duck got her little ones into the water, and kept them beside her, very close to the bank, so that they could hide among the reeds in case of danger. They swam right up to where that cousin of mine was sitting in the grass. He made one grand leap and seized a duckling and swallowed it as easily as I could a fly. It was splendidly done."

Afraid of giving offense if they told how they considered such a thing, the mice kept silent for a moment. Then Teckle asked what the bullfrog gets to eat in winter.

"He doesn't eat then. He goes quietly to sleep, as all creatures should, and sleeps until spring comes, when Mother Nature wakens the insects for his food, and calls him to get up and eat them."

"Does he climb up a tree and get into the hollow? That is the way our cousin, the bat, sleeps." This was the next question, for one never got much of a story out of Old Croaker except by dragging it forth by piecemeal.

"Up a tree! He up a tree? And what would he climb a tree for?" demanded Old Croaker indignantly. "That is a trick of the tree-frog, and even he doesn't sleep there in winter. No. The bullfrog dives down to the bottom of a still pool of water, where the mud is soft and deep. There he digs a deep hole for himself in the mud where it can never freeze, and there he sleeps all winter long, harming nobody, and in no danger of being

harmed by any one. Climb a tree!" Old Croaker again exclaimed, half indignant and half amused. "You'll be wanting to know next whether I hang myself up by the heels in a tree like the bat."

They let Old Croaker sing for a little while, just to soothe his ruffled temper. Then one of the mice asked:

"Is the bullfrog hatched from an egg, or —is he——"

"Of course he is, just as the toads are—just as I was."

Seeing that the little field-mice were very eager to know more of this mighty cousin of his, who some day might eat them, Old Croaker gave up trying to sing, and told them his life story in brief, without further questioning.

"Yes, he is hatched from an egg, but he isn't anything like a frog when he is hatched. He's all head, and mouth, and tail and appetite. Not a sign of a leg has he. No lungs, either, but gills so that he can breathe the water, in which he lives all the time. And no

long tongue, either, to flick the flies and moths and slugs into his mouth and eat them. Instead of a tongue he has an immense number of sharp little teeth. Oh, I tell you, we are a fierce lot of meat eaters when we are little. Why, we even eat each other if there is nothing else to be had. I remember once I ate two of my brothers—or helped to eat them. But I was a tadpole then, and not a toad at all.

"After a while the tadpole begins to sprout a pair of hind legs, and as they grow his tail shrinks up and disappears entirely. Doesn't break off, but just fades away and disappears. And the fore legs sprout and grow, too, later on. And the lungs grow, and as they get larger the gills wither up. And this goes on until some fine day the tadpole has legs and no tail, lungs and no gills, a tongue and no teeth, and lives on land and breathes air instead of water. Then he is either a toad or a frog, and not a tadpole any longer. Why, such a change is more wonderful than a caterpillar changing into a butterfly, for we

do not go to sleep to make it, but go on moving and eating and swimming and growing all the time."

"If you and the bullfrog are so much alike, how did you know which to be when you left the water?" demanded Tan.

Old Croaker stroked his face slowly and reflectively with one hand while he blinked wisely.

"I never had to think about it. Good old Mother Nature had arranged all that. I was a toad, thanks to her, not a frog. Since you mention it, how did you know whether to be a field-mouse and live in the woodland, or the kind of mouse that lives in a man's house?"

This was more than the field-mice had expected, so they sat silent. Old Croaker resumed his song presently, and they ran into the stump.

It so happened that the little field-mice witnessed the downfall of the mighty bullfrog, and again the three boys of the Bradley farm had a hand in what happened. The

boys had been fishing in Nineveh creek, where were a few bass, some gamey little sunfish, and a great many catfish and suckers. They had stayed on the creek until dusk fell, and were taking a short way home, right past the stump where lived Tan and Teckle. When they had come to the old water gate across Pleasant Run, and were about to walk across on the old log, the foremost boy suddenly stopped, and at a quick motion of his hand behind him the other two stood motionless.

"Look at the edge of the water," said the foremost boy in a low tone; "there's a bullfrog as big as a cat."

Of course the bullfrog was not that large, but he certainly did look to be a monster.

"Drop a hook down to him and see if he'll take it," suggested one, ever ready for an experiment. The hindmost boy stepped back out of sight of the bullfrog, unwound a line, and presently a bare fish-hook waved to and fro just before the bullfrog's nose. He never seemed to see it.

"Try him with a worm," suggested the second boy.

So a wriggling worm was impaled on the hook and dragged in the mud in front of the bullfrog. Again he refused the offer.

"I know what'll bring him. Daddy Roth told me they'll go wild if you show them red flannel."

There was no flannel at hand, but presently a piece was torn from a red bandana handkerchief, strung on the hook, and waved in front of the bullfrog. He seemed seized with rage exactly as a bull is when a red flag is shown him. He leaped eagerly at the bit of cloth, missed it, leaped again and seized it. Then the boy gave a twitch of the rod, and the bullfrog was lifted on the hook, kicking and clawing wildly.

Then Tan and Teckle saw, from their hiding place on the bank, that the bullfrog was indeed much longer than Old Croaker, but also much less "noble of girth" as he had said. They could plainly see the long, muscular legs, the webbed feet, the green back

and lighter belly, and the great, staring eyes. For a moment he hung, kicking in the air; then a boy took him off the hook and dropped him into the bag where he carried the fish, and bore him away.

"Oh, they're going to eat him," gasped Teckle, awe-stricken.

They hurried back to the old hollow stump and told Old Croaker what had befallen his cousin.

"Will they eat him?" demanded Teckle.

"Nobody ever knows what a boy will do," was the sage reply. "I have seen them kill creatures to eat, and I have seen them catch creatures and refuse to harm them. Men do eat bullfrogs, but what these boys will do is more than I can tell."

The mice, too, knew that the boys were sometimes merciful, for did they not once capture Teckle and let her go unhurt? They never did know certainly what became of the bullfrog. They often heard, after that night, a hoarse, booming voice away up the stream nearer the house, roaring out "Gro-o-o-om!

Gro-o-o-o-om!" And there was a rumor among the little wild people that the boys had turned the frog loose in the presence of a cat to see what would happen. That certainly sounded like them, and Tan and Teckle liked to think that the bullfrog they heard so often thereafter was the very same that they had seen captured. But they never were quite sure.

"Why should we trouble about it?" asked Tan one night. "Didn't Old Croaker say that he would eat us if he could?"

"Yes," agreed Teckle. "And besides, he ate the duckling."

THE SOIL MAKER

THERE had been a warm autumn rain, but just before sunset the clouds cleared away and the sun shone in almost level lines across the woodland, reaching spots which at midday were always in shadow, and turning almost the light of a bright noontide into the most retired nooks.

This bright light, thrown suddenly into the hitherto shady places, revealed a number of robins running about in the grass under the trees, and acting very strangely. One would run across the grass for quite a dis-

tance, then stop and stand perfectly still, seemingly looking at the ground. Sometimes he would run farther and stop again; sometimes he would thrust his beak into the ground and seem to be shaking something. Then, with head cocked pertly on one side, he would look and listen at the spot where he had been poking into the dirt. Occasionally one would seize what seemed to be a blade of grass, pull with all his might, and when he had torn it loose from the ground, would swallow it greedily.

"I wonder why the robins act so queerly about that grass," remarked Teckle, the little field-mouse. "If they like grass I should think they would stand in one place and eat as much as they want, like the cow."

"Who said they are eating grass?" demanded the bat, who had climbed out to the top of the hollow stump, and was making ready to fly forth for the night.

"Nobody said so, but I can see them running about, and every little while one pulls

up a blade of grass, and swallows it—at least I suppose it is grass."

"Robins never eat grass. Haven't you learned that yet? Those are the world's first farmers they are eating."

Tan and Teckle had learned not to reply when the bat spoke in riddles, for they knew that he would see that they did not understand, and would say the same thing in another way. Presently he went on:

"The robins are eating earthworms, and not grass at all. They have to be very cunning and very quick to catch a worm, though he has neither eyes nor ears nor nose nor feet."

That sounded much like another riddle, and the field-mice waited to hear more. When the bat did not go on, Tan demanded to know how, if he can neither see nor hear nor smell nor run, the worm can know when the robin is after him; and how, when he does know it, he can either fight or get away.

"He can neither fight nor run," replied the bat, "yet it is not easy to catch him. Think it over."

And, delighted at having puzzled the simple-minded little field-mice, the bat flapped away into the dusk and left them. Just then the sun dropped below the horizon, and almost immediately it was dark in the woodland. With many a cry of "quit-quit" called to each other, the robins flitted away to their roosting-place, and Tan and Teckle could watch them no farther that night. But another day they inquired farther, and heard many wonderful things of the earthworm, which they had sometimes seen but of whom they knew so little.

It is quite true, as the bat said, that the earthworm has neither eyes nor ears nor nose nor feet; but he has what answers very well for all his needs. If he did have any of these organs they would only be in his way—very possibly he did have some or all of them at one time, and good old Mother Nature took them away when she found that he did not use them. For the earthworm lives almost all his life under the surface of the ground, where there is no light at all; so of what use

would eyes be to him? He would only get them full of dirt if he opened them, so he might much better have none.

And what is the good of a nose when there is nothing which one needs to smell? The worm bores his way through the soft earth, and when he is close enough to a thing to smell it he is also close enough to touch and taste it. So if he ever had the sense of smell Mother Nature took it away when she saw that he no longer needed it in his way of living. The same is true of ears—living always underground, he has no need of them. And legs would be worse than useless—they would actually be in his way.

Now, to take the place of all these organs which the worm does not need, he has a very delicate and sensitive skin. He cannot see, but he can feel the light. He knows instantly whether he is in the darkness, which he loves, or in the light, which he fears. And if strong light shines upon him he starts to bore into the ground as quickly as he can to get away from it, for if he remains in the light long he dies.

This same sensitive skin serves the earthworm instead of ears. He has no need to hear the song of the birds, or the chirp of the grasshopper, or the wind among the leaves, or the call of animals one to another. But he can feel the jar of the footsteps of an approaching animal when it is still a long way off; and he can feel the patter of the raindrops as they strike the earth, and he creeps to the mouth of his burrow to enjoy the cool rain.

For the earthworm has a burrow which is his home, just as the old hollow oak stump was Tan and Teckle's home, and the tunnel beneath it was the muskrat's home. How does he get the earth out of his way when he digs, since he is so soft and has no feet for digging? He is much stronger than he looks, and with his sharp snout he pushes the dirt aside and packs it solidly against the sides of his burrow. Also, he often eats the dirt to get it out of his way. Queer, but true. He swallows the fine dirt, sand, decayed leaves and roots, and even bits of stone that are

quite large for him—swallows them and lets them pass right through his long body. But he creeps out of his burrow to allow this dirt and sand and gravel to pass from his body, and so leaves it on top of the ground.

That is what the bat meant when he called the earthworm the first farmer. He actually does dig up and loosen the ground all the time, so that air and water can sink into the ground, and the tiny roots of grass and other plants can find their way through the soil. Very wise men, who have spent many years studying the earthworm and his ways, tell us that in five years the worms will swallow and carry to the surface and leave there enough dirt to cover a field an inch deep with fine, soft dirt. It is impossible to estimate the good these poor creatures do by keeping the soil always light and porous, stirring and moving the dirt year after year, and bringing to the surface soil that has not had air or sunshine for many years, actually making soil.

In early summer, when the weather is warm and the ground is damp with frequent

rains, the earthworm lives close to the surface of the ground. And when it rains he crawls part way out of his burrow to enjoy the water. Sometimes he crawls entirely out and travels along on top of the ground. At night he creeps to the mouth of his burrow and stretches himself forth, careful to keep the tip of his body inside so that in case of sudden danger he can draw back into the burrow almost as a piece of rubber when it is stretched and one end is loosed.

That is what was happening when Tan and Teckle saw the robins after the worms. They had crept partly out of their burrows to enjoy the rain, and the robins were surprising them, and pulling them forth and eating them. Sometimes the worm got back into his burrow. In that case the robin thrust his beak into the ground and, by shaking it rapidly, he jarred the dirt and excited the worm—perhaps he thought it was rain—and he crept out, only to be caught and eaten.

In the winter the earthworm goes down to the bottom of his burrow, two or three or even

four feet deep, and goes to sleep. He might as well—the top of the ground is frozen so hard that he can neither bore through it nor eat of it, and neither is there anything else to eat. So he makes a little bedchamber at the bottom of his burrow, and there he curls up for the winter, sometimes with several other worms in the same bed, and there he sleeps until warm weather.

There is one curious thing which earthworms do in this winter bedroom which all the wise men of the earth have not yet been able to understand. They take to bed with them a number of rounded bits of stone. These pebbles are too large to be eaten, and nobody can explain what the worms do with them, or why they want them.

Earthworms also go deep into the ground in late summer and fall if the surface of the ground becomes dry. They must have moisture or they die. So when the earth begins to parch they begin to bore deeper where the dirt is still moist; and they will go very deep indeed if necessary to keep where the ground

is soft and damp. Then, at the first rainstorm, they come creeping to the surface again, and stretch forth from their burrows and enjoy the cool water.

The worm crawls by means of tiny thorns on his sides and under parts, so small they cannot be seen without a magnifying glass. They are like wee bristles. They can be felt if the worm is drawn through the fingers. These little bristles—setæ they are called—hold the hind part of the body firm while the worm stretches the front part of his body a long way ahead. Then, with the bristles, he holds the front end steady while he draws up the hind part, and so on. He seems to move slowly, yet it is surprising how far an earthworm will travel in an hour. But he leaves his burrow only when necessary, for he is quite defenseless, and as the bat said, can neither fight nor run.

Night is the chosen time for the earthworm to enjoy life. He fears the light, but when darkness comes on he stretches out from his front door, feeling his way in this direction

and that, finding a leaf to drag down into his burrow and eat; or perhaps he finds himself a mate. It is one peculiarity of earthworms, shared by several of what are called the lower forms of life, that each one is both a father and a mother. Each lays a number of eggs, enveloped in a sort of cocoon which is made in the odd-looking, thick, smooth, glistening ring which is found on every earthworm about one-quarter of the way back from his head. The little worms hatch and make their way out of the cocoon, and then they have nothing to do except to bore in the ground and eat. But they must be careful to keep under the ground as much as possible, and out of reach of robins, and of boys going fishing.

STRIPED FACE

CERTAINLY it was no fault of Striped Face that he had been caught when a tiny cub and brought up to be the dependent, the pet and plaything of mankind instead of living a free and wild life in the woodland. He could not be justly blamed, and yet the whole woodland community of little wild people looked upon it as a deep disgrace, and not one of them would have anything to do with him when he began to visit that particular corner of the Bradley farm where lived Tan and Teckle and their many neighbours.

The three boys of the Bradley farm were to blame in this, as in a great many matters which made life so exciting and so uncertain among the little wild folk. For in their younger days the boys took great delight in the old-fashioned Southern pastime of 'coon hunting with dogs at night. On one of these excursions they found the hollow tree in which Striped Face and his four brothers and sisters lay hidden, and carried them all away into captivity. It was not in the nature of a boy to set any of them at liberty; yet neither could they bring themselves to kill them as they were bidden by their elders. They compromised by giving the other four baby 'coons away to other boys, and Striped Face was the one they elected to keep for themselves.

The dogs viewed this arrangement with open displeasure. In their minds a 'coon was made to be hunted, and when anything is hunted and found it is to be killed. But the dogs were not consulted. A box was made into a cage and put into the back yard of the farmhouse, and in it Striped Face was kept.

He was too tiny at first to show much fear or resentment, and when he had been taught to drink warm milk, and eat sugar and bits of fruit, he gave himself up to the delights of eating, and actually began to like being a prisoner. And long before he was strong enough to fight he was very fond of the boys, and romped and played with them by the hour, and never thought of trying to escape.

But the dogs never forgave him, and never grew reconciled to having him about the place. They spent much of their time at first hanging about Striped Face's cage, trying to catch the little fellow. They would lie by the hour beside his box, sniffing at him and sometimes barking, until the boys drove them away. And one night while the dogs were thus occupied, so busy with Striped Face that they could not detect the scent of another animal, the mother of Striped Face came to the farmhouse. Perhaps she was seeking her stolen little one; perhaps she was merely hungry and happened to come there at that particular time. Whatever caused her visit,

she took occasion to dig a little hole under the edge of a coop on the ground, thrust in a long, flexible paw very like a hand, and drag out and kill nine ducklings that were sleeping under the wings of an old hen, their foster mother.

Oh, there was no mistaking who did it! At least it was one of Striped Face's family, for the tracks she left in the loose dirt showed that very, very plainly. The three boys agreed among themselves that it was Striped Face's mother come a-hunting him, though they did not tell their belief to any one. And the dogs, too, knew that it was a 'coon, for when the boys led them to the ravaged coop, and, with many upbraidings because they had not kept better watch, ordered them to follow the trail, they started out with the bark they always gave when trailing a 'coon.

The trail by that time was very old, and Striped Face's mother was a 'coon of many years and much experience. She had been hunted many a time, and knew what to do. So instead of returning directly to her den,

she travelled far that night, crossed and recrossed her tracks, and spent much time in the water, which leaves no trail, so that the dogs, after running up and down the woodland for an hour, wailing dismally on the cold trail, gave up the chase and went home.

Before he had been a captive many weeks, Striped Face was fitted with a little collar and chain, and was allowed to play about the door of his cage, inside or outside as he might choose. He was nimble enough to get in before a dog could catch him; and besides, the boys, by dint of hard words and a few floggings, had taught the dogs that this particular 'coon was part of the family, and not to be disturbed. So in time they learned to avoid the cage, though they often cast longing looks at it, and growled under their breath whenever they saw Striped Face.

And he—the rogue grew fat and sleek and handsome with high living and few cares. He learned to climb up on the boys' shoulders, and poke his feet—so like little hands—into their pockets to find sugar, or candy, or

bits of cake or fruit. Sometimes a boy would tease him by holding a bit of candy close in his hand. Striped Face would work very gently for a time, scratching lightly for it with his nails, thrusting his long, slender tongue between the boy's fingers, and coaxing all the while with an odd little whine. But if none of these measures sufficed, he would use his teeth—very gently at first, then more and more vigorously until the hand was opened and he got his reward.

When he was almost grown Striped Face was freed even of the collar and chain, and was allowed to roam about the place at will. The boys kept close watch over him at first, directed his movements, and at night fastened him in his cage. But after a time this was thought unnecessary, and he was allowed to go and come at will. And, being a night roamer, he spent his nights investigating the farm, and much of his days in the cage asleep.

Of course one of the very first sins Striped Face committed when he was given his liberty was to steal eggs; but eggs were very

plentiful and very cheap on the Bradley farm, and the boys kept his pilferings secret as far as they could, so that there was little complaint about the eggs. But in his prowlings about the kitchen door when he was not watched he often found other things which he could carry away and eat, and more than once there were threats that unless that 'coon mended his ways the boys must banish him.

When Striped Face attained his full size, because he had been well fed, had never known cold, nor illness, nor want, he was one of the largest 'coons ever seen in that country. He grew less and less afraid of the dogs, partly because he fully realized that they were not allowed to molest him, and partly because he was confident of his own strength and sharp teeth. For a 'coon is a bold and skillful fighter. He proved this one day. He had long ago acquired the habit of teasing the dogs, provoking them to chase him, and then climbing a tree or walking serenely along the top of the fence where they could not reach him, spitting at them while they barked

below, until a boy drove them away. One day Striped Face saw a dog eating something in the yard. He was not hungry, but in a spirit of bravado he ambled up and snarled at the dog, meaning to drive him away. The dog was not disposed to give up a bone he had found for himself, so he snarled back, and in a moment a noisy fight was in progress.

It happened that the other dogs were not at the house, or they might have joined and made the combat unequal. It also happened that the boys were not at home, or they would have stopped the fight. The women of the household, thinking to separate the animals, threw buckets of cold water on them. This had no effect on their tempers, but it quickly made the ground very slippery, which was exactly what Striped Face would have chosen. With his broad, flat feet and long claws he could easily stand on the muddy surface, while at every lunge the dog slipped, and often fell. And it was a badly clawed, bitten and humiliated dog which was finally rescued when one of the hired men, hearing the com-

motion, ran from the barn and put a stop to the battle.

All that summer Striped Face lived in his cage in the back yard of the farmhouse, getting experience. Night after night he wandered farther and farther away, tried his hand at fishing for minnows, learned to catch frogs and grasshoppers, climbed corn stalks for the tender ears, stole eggs, and the farmer strongly suspected that he also stole an occasional young duck or chicken, but this could not be definitely proven unless the boys had chosen to speak, which they never did. And all the while Striped Face was learning how to take care of himself, he was also learning the intimate ways of boys and dogs, which was to be very useful knowledge in days to come.

Finally came the day when Striped Face ran away. If there was any particular reason for it nobody ever knew, not even the boys. They came to the conclusion, after many talks, that old Mother Nature had called him to take up the wild life, and he could not resist. At first it was feared that some hunter had

caught him, or that some accident had befallen him, and the boys sought everywhere, calling their pet. But afterwards it become very clear that he had gone away of his own accord, and was living the life that suited him best. He never again went to the farmhouse except when he wanted poultry or eggs.

And of all places in that wide stretch of woodland and hill and river bottom, what place should the renegade Striped Face choose for his den but a hollow box elder tree on the bank of Nineveh creek only a little way from the hollow stump where lived Tan and Teckle, the little field-mice! There was great excitement among the little wild people when this happened. Every one was sure that the boys and dogs would come a-hunting to that part of the woodland, usually so quiet and retired, and that every nest and hiding place there would be found.

But the cunning of Striped Face averted any such calamity. He had picked on that spot for his home, and it was part of his duty not to lead boys and dogs to it. In the

daytime he slept in his hollow tree, snug and safe. When dusk fell he came forth, and nothing for miles around was safe from him. He caught frogs and minnows, he ate birds when he could get them, he captured and ate crawfish, he gorged himself on wild mulberries and young corn in the field, and more than once he came sniffing and scratching about the stump where lived Tan and Teckle, whom no doubt he would have eaten if he could have caught them.

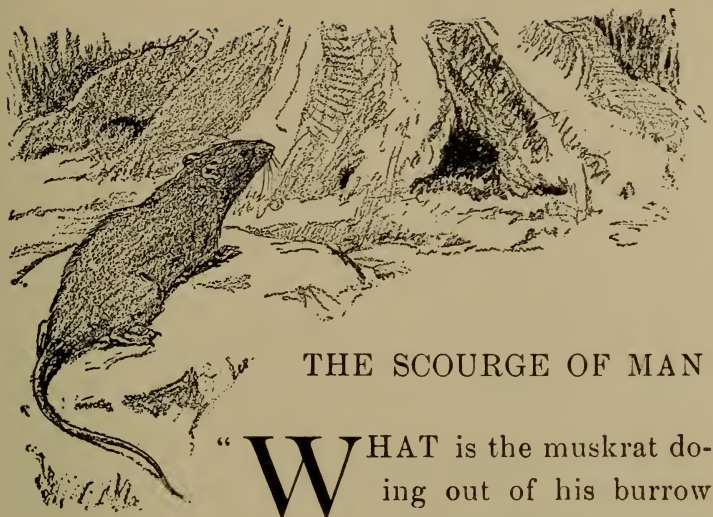
They saw him sometimes, on his excursions along Pleasant Run brook, and they marvelled at his trick of washing everything so carefully before he ate it. No matter whether it was fruit or flesh, if he could get into the water with it he scrubbed and scoured it almost to shreds as he ate. And when he came in from field or forest, where he had eaten without water, he spent a long time washing and scrubbing himself.

But for all his disagreeable qualities as a neighbour, Striped Face was careful to put the dogs off the scent before coming home,

and his very nearness to Tan and Teckle's home probably served to keep the boys and dogs away. For he made his forays on the chickens and ducks early in the night, so that he always had plenty of time to lay out a devious trail which the dogs could not follow. After winding in and out for a mile or so he would get into the creek and wade and swim a long way, leaving absolutely no trail. Another trick he learned was to climb into a tree from the top of a fence, and leap down from the farther side, to deceive the dogs. He had a hundred tricks, and usually he was fast asleep in his box elder tree while the dogs were panting on his track.

The doings of Striped Face himself would make a long, long story, for he lived in the woodland for many a year, and proved himself so cunning and resourceful, and such an enemy to mankind, that finally he was quite forgiven for having been a dependent of man. But Tan and Teckle could never quite like him because he was a meat eater, and at any time might try to eat them.

"ANOTHER TRICK HE LEARNED WAS TO CLIMB INTO A TREE FROM THE TOP OF A FENCE"



THE SCOURGE OF MAN

"WHAT is the muskrat doing out of his burrow at this hour?" asked Teckle, the little field-mouse, looking from the doorway of the old stump in which she and Tan lived.

"If that is the muskrat he has been travelling in the sun so long that it has burned him gray," replied Tan.

They both looked intently at a brownish-gray form that came scurrying across the woodland, though it was not yet mid-afternoon. He was really about the size of the muskrat, but as Tan had observed, the colour was not the same—it was lighter. But there were the same short ears, blunt muzzle, hair-

less and scaly tail, and the peculiar, leaping gait was very similar. Every little way the stranger stopped to look about him, and always he paused in a clump of weeds, or under a fallen branch of a tree, or beside a log. And when he moved, he went warily, and seemed to be on his guard against enemies.

What most concerned Tan and Teckle was that the unknown was making directly towards their hollow stump. What if he should be some strange and terrible kind of meat eater! They watched in silence, and with growing uneasiness. Finally when he was so near that it seemed that he must see them, with one accord they turned and scampered back into their hollow stump, and deep down under the ground into a long, slender, hollow root.

Sure enough, the stranger came right into their stump. They heard him pause at the entrance and sniff inquiringly. They heard him creep into the body of the stump. He rustled around for a time as if he were either

seeking food, or finding out all about the inside of the stump. After a time he was still, and they thought he must have fallen asleep.

After waiting for what seemed to them a very long time, the timid field-mice ventured to climb up and peep at the intruder who had taken possession of their home. They knew, both from his actions and from his scent, that he was no muskrat. Still, when they came to look closely at him, he was very like, except for the colour and the lack of webbed feet. He was resting quietly on the bits of decayed wood at the bottom of the stump. If he heard or smelled the field-mice he gave no sign.

"May you never be frightened," said Tan by way of greeting when he could muster up the courage.

"Plenty of food for you without the labour of getting it," responded the stranger, looking calmly at the frightened pair.

All the time, they were ready, at the slightest sign of anger on the part of the stranger, to scurry down to the very end of a long, hol-

low root, where they knew his plump body could not follow them.

"Do you live in this woodland?" inquired Tan.

"In the woods? Not I! For many summers I have lived at the farmhouse."

Was this another of man's dependents? Could it be that man had tamed this creature and set him to work, even as he had the horse and the cow, the sheep and the goat, the fowls and even the silkworm? They wondered what kind of work he could do.

"What do they call you?" was Tan's next query. "We are Tan and Teckle, the field-mice."

"I call myself the Scourge of Man, but man calls me the rat."

"Do you, then, work for man?"

"You're an odd creature," said the rat. "First you want to know if I live in the woods like a rabbit or a squirrel; now you want to know if I work for man.

"I'll have you know, little chap, that I make man work for me. I work for nobody

but myself, and the only work I do is of my own choosing. Work for man! I'll tell you some of the work I've done for man in the summers and winters I have lived in the house with him.

"I have gnawed holes in the walls and the floors of his house, and have taken his choicest food—sweets, meats, bread, nuts, cheese, milk, butter—everything that he had gathered for himself.

"I have gone into the nests of his fowls, and carried off the eggs they had laid for him. And I have eaten the ducklings and little chickens, and his rabbits too.

"I have gone into his barns and cut holes in his granary, and have eaten of his wheat and oats and corn, I have bitten his choicest apples, and have feasted off his vegetables.

"I have eaten what I wanted, wasted what I chose, and scattered filth over the remainder. That is how I have worked for man."

"I think that is a shame! I wonder that man has not long ago driven you out or killed you."

Tan was not as gentle as his wont, for though he disliked man, and had the loathing of a wild creature for those who work for man and depend on him for a living, yet he thought the rat had used man badly.

"So does man wonder that he has not killed me or driven me away," rejoined the rat saucily. "He has been trying to do both ever since the first rat came to live with him. Man is very wise in some ways, and very stupid in others. He thought to kill me by putting out traps. He did catch a few young and foolish rats, but the others of us learned about traps. I know a trap when I see it or smell it; and I know by instinct where it is when I can neither see nor smell it. He cannot catch me.

"Also he has tried to feed me on the food that kills. I tasted it once, but I knew enough not to eat of it. The taste made me ill, and I never touched it again. Some young rats were hungry and foolish, and ate of the food that kills. They died, but the

world is always full of the young and foolish, and they were never missed.

"His dogs have often tried to catch me. Cats, too, he keeps about him. Sometimes they get the young and foolish, but not the old and wise.

"And in return for all this, what have I done for man? I have lived with him in his own house despite him. I have torn up his garments to make a nest for myself. I have run about between the walls of his house and disturbed his sleep. I have taken the food he meant for himself, and have soiled what I did not eat so that he could not use it. And at the moment when he was threatening to kill every rat in his house, my mate brought forth ten little ones under the floor beneath his bed. Yes, and they all lived to be grown, and went to make nests of their own.

"And you ask me if I work for man!"

"Why are you travelling?" asked Teckle.

"Not because of anything man has done, you may be sure. I am going away for a time because of an enemy that has come to

the barn. For days a weasel has been there, and he is killing my people. I am a fighter, but I know he can kill me, so I am going away until he is killed. Then I will return."

"Do you think he will be killed? Who will do it?"

"The farmer, of course. Doesn't he kill every creature that does good for him? Because the weasel sometimes eats chickens, it will not be many days until the farmer will kill the weasel. But until then I choose to live at some other farmhouse, where there is no weasel."

"Why not live in the woodland and be independent?"

"I prefer to live in man's house and make him work for me. So I will rest here until it is dark, go on to some other man's house, and live there for a time."

The bat was hanging in the upper part of the stump asleep while all this talk was going on, but when it was dusk, and he crept out of the stump to fly away, Tan and Teckle told him of the strange visitor. The bat told them

that the rat had rightly named himself the Scourge of Man, for not only is all that he said true, but much more besides.

For the rat is scattered all over the world, wherever civilized man lives. He eats constantly, and he eats almost everything. He eats even his own little ones, or his brothers, if he is very hungry and there is nothing else to be had. A few times rats have been known to combine in great numbers and kill and eat a man, for they are very strong and fierce, and fight bravely when there is need. It has often happened that little children have been attacked and killed.

The rat is very brave and very difficult to kill. He is armed with four very long teeth in front—two above and two below, as strong and as sharp as little chisels. With these he can quickly cut through any wooden wall or door or floor, and can even make a hole through brick. These teeth are dangerous weapons, and it is a brave cat which will attack a full-grown rat. Even a dog, unless he be very large or very well trained, is

usually beaten when he tries to overcome an old rat.

If there were but a few rats, even with their aggressive ways they might be patiently endured. But a single pair will bring forth in a year four or five litters, each numbering from four or five to ten or even twelve. And a female rat only four months old will mate and bring forth young, so that before the end of the year the first and second litters would be bringing up families of their own. With this in mind it will be seen that in a year a single pair of rats might increase to a hundred, or in exceptional circumstances, to almost twice that number.

Of course this would be unusual, for it would mean that almost every young rat should escape all its enemies, and live to be grown and bring forth young as early as possible. In real life cats and dogs, men and boys, owls and hawks, weasels and snakes, combine to keep down their numbers much below this standard. But even with all these enemies, rats multiply so fast and thrive so

well that man pays a fearful toll each year—enough wasted food to feed all the hungry of the world.

And if only this were the worst! But it is not. In recent years it has been discovered that the rat is the chief means of carrying from one part of the country to another—and even from one country to another—one of the most terrible of human diseases. Just as the mosquito bites a man ill of yellow fever, and carries it to a man who otherwise never would take the disease, and gives it to him by biting him, just so the rat carries the dreaded Asiatic cholera from man to man.

But with this difference: The rat does not actually bite the man to give him the disease, but he carries it to him in a peculiar manner. The rat is always infested with fleas. These fleas sometimes leave the rat and bite people; and just as often they leave people and live on rats. When a flea has bitten a man who has Asiatic cholera, and afterwards bites a rat, he gives the disease to the rat. And thereafter every flea which bites the sick rat and then

bites a man, woman or child, he gives to each one of his victims the terrible cholera.

This explains what all the doctors and wise men for hundreds of years were not able to understand—just how the cholera travels across a country, and is given to persons who have not been near any one suffering with the disease. The rats and the fleas carry it. And as rats are great travellers, it follows that they take the scourge from one land to another on ships and railway trains. A few years ago when thousands of Chinese were dying daily of the plague, rats brought the disease over the ocean in ships, and American cities along the Pacific coast had a difficult task to keep it from spreading. A great war was waged against the rats, and hundreds of thousands were killed. But the fleas carried the cholera to the squirrels, and they, too, were slain by thousands before the cities felt safe.

It is in this sense, much more than because he eats and destroys so much food, that the rat is really the Scourge of Man, as he boasted.

Tan and Teckle slept unmolested in their

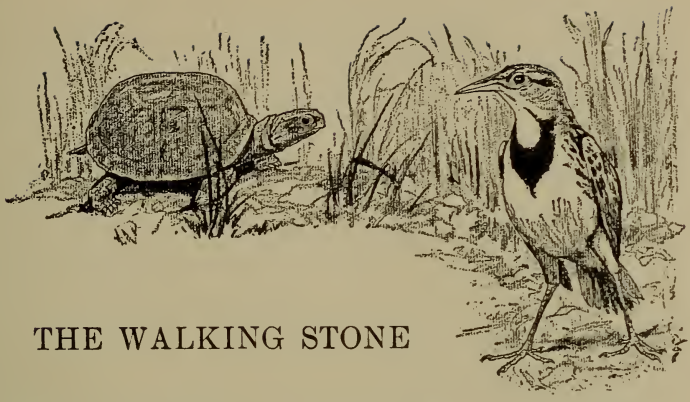
own nest the rest of that afternoon, while the rat lay and rested, and perhaps slept, on the floor of their hollow stump. They were a trifle afraid to stir about, even when evening came, until they heard him creeping out of the stump. Then they climbed up to watch him go.

The rat crept to the end of the hollow root that formed a doorway to the old stump, and peered out. He saw nothing to alarm him. If he could only have known that what seemed an old dead snag of a tree was partly a snag and partly something else! But he did not know. So he started bravely across the woodland. Tan and Teckle ran out to the doorway to watch him out of sight.

He had made but a few leaps across the grass when what seemed a part of the old dead snag dropped noiselessly as a feather—but oh, so swiftly! The rat did not see it until it was very near him. He sprang aside, threw up his head and bared those terrible teeth, but he was no match for this foe. A pair of immense brown wings spread over

him and hid him from sight of the watchers, an enormous pair of talons seized him, the weight of a heavy body crushed him against the ground and forced the long claws deep into his body. He gave one loud shriek of defiance and pain, and was still, and as the great owl flapped his silent brown wings across the woodland, the rat hung soft and limp beneath him.

"And to-morrow the farmer would kill the owl if he could, just because he sometimes takes a turkey," mused Tan.



THE WALKING STONE

IT looked like a weather-worn, rounded stone about the size of a butter dish, covered with dust and dirt, lying in the grass. In colour it was a dusty brown, blotched here and there with dull orange yellow, as if lichen had tried to grow there, but found the soil too poor, and, dying, had turned yellow. And, like a stone that has been used to mark a boundary, it had carved on it some letters and figures.

But can a stone move? Surely this object did. True, it lay on a hillside, and you might have thought that something had started it to rolling. But the hillside was not steep. More than that, the stone did not roll—it moved along on the same side on which it

lay, just as if it were dragged along with a string. The meadow lark that had alighted close beside it, and was wagging his tail before beginning a song, looked again to be sure that his eyes had not deceived him, and with a terrified "Sprake! Sprake!" fled wildly to the other side of the meadow. Stone or not, it certainly moved.

If you had been there to watch, and had looked on from a little distance, quietly and without motion, you might have seen a queer little head, with the keenest of red eyes, watching from under the front edge of this moving object. And down in the grass beneath you might have had a glimpse of four feet plodding steadily but warily along.

But if you went too near, or made a movement that was noticed by those fiery little red eyes, you would have seen no more head, no more feet, and there would have been no more walking for a while. You might have heard a hiss, like that of a snake or a goose, but head and feet would have disappeared like magic, and if you picked up the strange ob-

ject it would still have looked very like a rounded, flattened stone.

Nothing happened to alarm the little pilgrim, and he kept steadily on down the hill as if he had something definite to do. Down the dry and dusty hillside, into the gloom and cool of the woodland he travelled at the same slow, steady pace, turning neither to right nor left. And presently he drew near to the old hollow oak stump in which dwelt Tan and Teckle. Of course they saw him. Few things passed that way that they were not aware of. But they watched in silent wonder, for this was another new neighbour.

First of all they wondered whether he were a meat eater. They soon found that he ate insects at least, for they plainly saw him dart forth his head and long, slender neck, and seize a slug that was crawling on the grass. And presently they saw him eating a green leaf. An earthworm that had crawled from its burrow was snatched up, too, and swallowed.

Dusk fell as they watched, and the bat

came scrambling out of the stump for his nightly flight.

"Box turtle," he said, shortly, when they pointed out the stranger. "No, he won't try to hurt you."

The bat seemed in an ill temper that evening, and flapped away without explaining any further. But they were to learn more, merely by keeping quiet and watching, which they had found a very good way to learn.

With the twilight came also Striped Face, the raccoon that had run away from the three boys of the Bradley farm, and now lived in the hollow box elder tree near by. When the sun went down he climbed up out of the hole where he had slept all day, and sat for a while in the fork of the tree, watching and listening. He spied the queer object coming across the woodland, and to him, also, it looked like a stone. Even if he had not been hungry Striped Face would have been curious to know what it was. But he was both hungry and curious, so he made haste to scramble down the tree. He crept quietly upon the

little stranger, and was quite near before he was seen. He made a quick rush to seize his prey, expecting that this strange animal would either fight or run.

Greatly to his surprise, it did neither. As he seized it he heard a defiant hiss, but he was not afraid. He had killed more than one goose, and they always hissed when alarmed. Striped Face was still more surprised that his teeth did not sink into soft flesh as he had expected. They felt as if he had really seized a stone instead of some animal fit to eat. He gave it one good, hard bite, and laid it down on the grass to have a good look at it.

The turtle lay as if dead. Striped Face looked at it in astonishment. He had never known anything like this. Well, if its back were hard, perhaps its head, or at any rate its legs, might be good eating. And it had both, for he had seen them. But where were they? Not a trace of head, or leg, or even tail could he find. They had disappeared entirely. All he could see was a rounded, flattened ob-

ject, which looked like a stone, and which might as well have been a stone for all he could get to eat from it.

Cautiously Striped Face poked one paw under the edge of the turtle's shell and with a sudden flip turned him on his back and seized him with his teeth again. He had no better success than before. The turtle was flattened on the under side, and the light brown colour there was irregularly blotched with pale yellow as if it had lain on the grass in one spot for a long time, and had taken part of its colour from the bleached grass. But it was just as hard beneath as above, and Striped Face's teeth made no more impression.

The raccoon was sorely puzzled. He laid the turtle down and walked around it at a little distance, watching it narrowly. Then he went close and poked it gently with one paw. Nothing happened. He drew nearer and poked it about with both paws. He pushed, and poked, and pried, and scratched, and turned it over and over and around and

around, but he never could find the legs and head which he knew had been there.

Then a bright idea occurred to Striped Face. He would gnaw this thing open. He took it up in his fore paws just as a child would a piece of bread and butter, and began to work on the edge of it with his keen teeth. He succeeded in making some scratches on the tough shell, but that was all. He worked hard, for he knew by the smell, and by having seen it walk, that there was some living animal inside, and who knew but it was as good to eat as chicken, or goose?

His work was all in vain. He was making no impression on the hard shell, and he knew it. He laid the turtle down in the grass where he had found it, and walked away very much disgusted. He went straight to the creek and began searching in the grass along the bank for frogs.

The box turtle had used its one and only method of defense—it had drawn itself entirely inside the shell and closed both doors. The mud turtle and many of his cousins have

shells on the backs and breasts, but can only draw their head, legs and tail under the upper shell and trust to luck to escape. But the box turtle has his under shell hinged in the middle, so that both ends can be pulled up so tightly against the upper shell that a pin can scarcely be poked between them. And he is very strong and can hold the doors shut against great force. Once he closes these doors he is safe against any ordinary danger. Only a very large and strong animal, or a man or boy with an axe or some such weapon, can break in and get him.

For an hour or more after Striped Face had gone the turtle lay in the grass motionless. Time has no great value to a turtle, and he is very patient. He lives to a great age—some say fifty years or more—and he seldom has need to hurry. So, though he was on his way to dinner, the turtle wanted to be very sure it was safe before he made another move. After a long, long time the front door of his shell opened just a tiny bit. Nothing happened. So slowly that if you had been

watching you could not have seen it move, the shell opened wider. Then from among the folds of tough and wrinkled skin a sharp little snout was poked into view, with a pair of tiny nostrils at the tip, and the keen, fiery little red eyes close behind them. The turtle was afraid that Striped Face might be waiting near by, ready to seize him again. But neither nose nor eyes gave him warning of a foe. Then, slowly and cautiously, four short legs and a ridiculous little tail came into view, and the turtle resumed his interrupted journey.

Oh, yes, he knew perfectly well where he was going. He had been there before. There was a certain corn field not far away, and when the three boys of the Bradley farm had planted the corn there in the spring, they had for their own enjoyment planted a number of melon seeds. Despite the plowing the vines grew, and a number of melons ripened in the late summer. The boys ate a few, but for the most part they let them lie on the ground and the little wild people got them.

That is where the turtle was bound. He made his way, without further adventure, to the field, and gorged himself on the sweet little canteloupes and muskmelons. He took all the time he needed, for time mattered nothing to him. Little he cared where he slept. So it was that when morning came he was just starting back to the dry meadowland, and the three boys, abroad early again, met him on the way.

"Oh, look! Another box turtle!" exclaimed one.

They ran to seize him. He gave a most venomous hiss, but they were not afraid—it was only the great snapping turtle that could make them careful. They picked him up fearlessly.

"What's that on his back?" cried one. "Letters, sure as anything! Read 'em."

The letters and figures were carefully spelled out.

"Some fellow's initials—I wonder whose. And the date—why he's more'n twenty years old. That was cut there twenty years ago,

an' no telling how old he was then. Let's give him a new date."

So with a pocket knife a new date and three new sets of initials were carved on the turtle's back.

"Something's been after him," said a boy, looking closely at the scratches on the edge of the shell. "Look here at the marks of teeth. Dog, I s'pose, or maybe a 'coon or a fox."

Little did they think that Striped Face had made those marks, and that he was that moment lying within a very little distance of them, hearing all they said.

When they had finished carving their initials on his back, the boys put the turtle down again. They knew better than to try to wait until he resumed his journey—they had done that before, and knew how long it took. So they put him down and went their way.

When he was perfectly sure that the boys had gone the turtle put forth his head and feet, and went on his way to the upland meadow. There, in the dry, gravelly soil, he

resumed the digging of a burrow which he had begun many days before, and meant to have completed before cold weather came on. For there, many feet below the depth to which the ground could freeze, he meant to spend the winter, sound asleep.

ANOTHER KILLER

THIS is the story of how the muskrat came to leave the burrow where he had lived so happily all summer long. As you may remember, this burrow ran from the edge of the water in Pleasant Run brook, far back under the steep bank, and ended directly beneath the great, hollow, oak stump in which lived Tan and Teckle, the little field-mice. The burrow had two entrances: one beside the brook, where the muskrat could slip directly into the water, and when he came home could step from the water directly into the burrow. Indeed, when

the brook carried a little more water than usual the entrance was under water, and to his great delight the muskrat could dive under the surface and come up inside his own tunnel.

The other entrance was through the hollow stump. The tap root—the big, central root that goes straight down—was hollow its entire length. And Tan and Teckle and the muskrat, among them, had gnawed a hole in the tap root so that they could pass freely back and forth, though they did not often use it as a door. The muskrat, especially, seldom passed through the stump, preferring to glide from his front door into the water, and not show himself on the land at all. But it was sometimes very convenient to have another way in and out, as you shall presently see.

One night Tan and Teckle were outside the stump, sitting on the bank of the brook, nibbling at grass roots, and enjoying the warm autumn air, always keeping a sharp lookout for enemies.

"Here comes the muskrat," said Tan, as a small, black head came into view around the

"FAIRLY HURLED HIMSELF INTO THE WATER"

bend up stream, a tiny ripple spreading away from each side. "I thought he was already inside. How happy he must be. He gets nearly all his food in the water, seldom has to show himself on land, and seems to have no enemy but the owl."

"He is quieter than usual," observed Teckle. "I believe he is not coming in at all —yes, there he is turning to the bank."

At first the small, black head had seemed about to keep on down the stream, but just as it got abreast the muskrat's tunnel it paused, turned, and made abruptly for the mouth of the tunnel. The next moment the muskrat came tearing out of the stump at top speed, ran to the edge of the bank, and fairly hurled himself over into the water with a loud splash.

"Run, Little Brother, while you can!" he exclaimed as he went over.

If Tan and Teckle had watched him they would have seen that the muskrat did not come to the surface until he had swam a long way. Then he merely poked his nose up

very quietly under a tuft of grass at the edge of the bank, took a long breath, dived again and swam under water as far as he could. He seemed terribly frightened.

But Tan and Teckle did not waste time watching what the muskrat did. There was a hollow limb on the ground near by, in which they had more than once taken refuge in time of sudden danger, and into it they scrambled when the muskrat gave warning. The hollow was very long and narrow, and they crept into it as far as they could, so that none but a very small creature could get near them. Safe in there they could not see what happened outside, but it was this:

Out from the hollow stump, following the trail of the muskrat, came a long, slender, almost serpent-like creature. His body was very long and willowy, and his legs very short so that he ran very near the ground. His head was round and quite small, with beady, black eyes, very short ears, and a patch of pure white at his throat. Otherwise he was dark brown—almost black, and seemed en-

tirely black when he was wet. He did not seem to be running very fast, but there was a cat-like quickness and ease and grace to all his movements that made them seem much slower than they really were.

It was a mink, first cousin to the weasel, but much larger, stronger, quite as active and daring, and fully as blood-thirsty. His feet are partly webbed, and he swims as well as the muskrat. The mink had been swimming down the brook looking for a duck, a fish, a frog, or indeed almost anything he could kill, when he saw the muskrat at the door of his burrow. It was the mink, and not the muskrat, that Tan and Teckle had seen coming down the stream.

When he turned in towards the mouth of the burrow, the mink meant to follow the muskrat inside, and catch and eat him right there. The mink is so slender that he can follow a muskrat or a rabbit into any hole or burrow. If he had known that there was another way out, he would have run faster, and caught the muskrat before he could climb

out through the stump. But the mink thought he had plenty of time; he had never before seen a muskrat burrow with two entrances.

When the mink had followed the muskrat through the stump and to the bank of the creek, he knew that he had lost his prey, and did not waste time just then trying to find him. He knew that the frightened creature was far away and securely hidden by that time, and water leaves no trail. So he turned his attention to other things. He had caught the scent of field-mice, and with his keen nose to the ground, he followed their trail to the hollow limb. Tan and Teckle, trembling inside, heard him sniff at the hole, and scratch a little at the limb to see whether it were soft enough to be easily torn open. But the wood was quite solid, so he turned away and did not try to get at them. They caught the strong odour of the mink, which is a little like that of the skunk but not so offensive; and they scented his breath, plainly that of a meat eater. Then he was gone.

The mink did not return at once to the water. He walked stealthily down the bank of the stream to where it flows into Nineveh, the large creek. On the way he found a crawfish outside its mud chimney, and ate it. A little farther along he surprised a young frog at his singing, and caught and ate him.

When the mink reached Nineveh creek he slid without a sound or a ripple into the water, and swam away so slowly and quietly that you would have thought the little, round, black head a bit of wood floating on the stream. But when a bass arose to the surface to catch a grasshopper that had fallen in, and slapped the surface with his tail and started back to his deep pool again, he found too late that it was no floating stick that he had seen. For the mink curved his long neck, dived with the speed and grace of an otter, and in another instant the fish was in the grasp of his long, keen teeth.

The bass was large and strong, but the mink had cleverly caught him just back of the head, so that his teeth tore cruelly through the

tender gills, staining the water a deeper colour in the moonlight. The struggle was quickly over, and the mink crouched at the edge of the water and ate a fish dinner.

There was a rustling among the dry leaves at the top of the bank, and a woods rabbit looked inquiringly over. He took just one look, and with eyes almost popping from his head with terror he went tearing through the woods as if the red fox were after him again. He knew the mink. And he knew that the mink could follow him into any hole or burrow he might choose, and drag him forth. The only way he could escape the mink was to run fast and far, and that he did with all his might.

When he had eaten the fish, or as much of it as he wanted, the mink left the creek and followed a fence row towards the farmhouse. Just because he could, he caught a sleeping sparrow in the grass and ate him. By this time he had eaten as much as he wanted himself, but he would still kill for the love of killing, and for the taste of the warm, red blood.

Besides, he had others to think of. In a little den under a shelf of slate rock on the bank of Pleasant Run, far above where Tan and Teckle lived, were his mate and seven young. To be sure, the young minks were by now almost as large as their mother, but they still liked to have food brought to them. And that is what the mink had in mind.

He easily made his way into the poultry house—this was by no means his first visit. He found some half-grown chickens asleep on the sloping roost, and very quietly crept up beside them. He seized one by the head, and with a single snap of his sharp teeth pierced the poor thing's brain. It struggled a little, but not enough to alarm the others and set them to flapping and squalling, and so bring the farmer and the dogs. The mink crouched on the ground and drank the blood, and then started to drag the fowl to his den. It was no easy task, but he did it. He left so plain a trail that it is a wonder that the dogs did not follow it up when morning came, but for some reason they did not. It was almost sun-

rise when he finally reached the den under the shelf of rock, and while the seven young ones were tearing the fowl in pieces, the old mink crept into a dark corner and went to sleep for the day.

But the muskrat—what of him? When he made his frantic plunge from the top of the bank into the brook, he made his way as rapidly as he could a long distance down stream, swimming under water and coming to the surface only to get breath and dive again. He took his frantic course to where lay a large hollow log with one end deep under the water. Here he dived and came up inside the log, and lay there in the water with just the tip of his nose out, waiting until the mink should give up the hunt for him and go away.

When the muskrat finally did find courage to return home, he was so afraid that the mink would come back and catch him as he slept, that he left that very night and chose another nest. Away up Nineveh creek, where a great sycamore tree had fallen into the water, a pile of driftwood had gathered. Here the muskrat

made his way, and in the shelter of the great pile of uprooted trees, broken branches, fence rails, straw and weeds and corn-stalks, he dug himself a fresh burrow in the bank. It was not until another year, after the bat had told him of the tragic fate that befell the mink in the winter, that the muskrat dared move back to the old stump and live with Tan and Teckle.

As for the little field-mice, they felt that they were as safe there as they could hope to be anywhere. True, the mink would eat a mouse as readily as he would a fish or a muskrat or a chicken, but they could always hear him coming, they thought, and could take refuge in a hollow root where he could not get at them. So they continued to live in the old stump ; and whether the mink did not know that they lived there, or whether he forgot about them, or whether he found so much to eat other-where that he did not care to trouble them, he never came to the old stump again.

A NEW WAY TO FLY

FROST had come to the Bradley farm. For several nights the sky had been clear and the air crispy cold, and the morning sun found a thick coat of white on fences, logs, stones, grass and wayside weeds. And when the sun had shone on the green things and melted the frost away, they showed strangely black and wilted, as if they had been choked.

The nuts had begun to tumble down in earnest. Acorns, beechnuts, butternuts, walnuts, and chinquapins in the deep woods, and hazelnuts in the underbrush, came popping from their burrs and rattling down among the

leaves. And the pawpaws and wild persimmons, instead of hanging on tightly to their twigs as they had been doing, were dropping into the grass of their own accord, no longer waiting for hungry opossum or impatient boy to pull them loose.

The woodland fairly flamed under the magic touch of autumn. Not anywhere else in the world are there such scarlets and crimsons as come into the leaf of the sugar maple when the frost touches it. And all the yellows of all the lemons and oranges in the world are in the showers of leaves from the blue ash and the great black walnut trees. The oaks flaunt their maroons and purples, the beeches their silver grays, and each tree of all the forest lights its fires of colour, all the way from fading green to the most vivid reds and yellows.

When the frosts came, the sky itself took on a softer hue. Its blue was much less vivid, and it seemed much less hard and far away. Everything was seen through a haze, like a very sheer, soft veil, that took away all the

hard lines and angles, and when one looked at woods and field and river, it was like recalling a dream-landscape, but dimly remembered.

Many things puzzled Tan and Teckle, the little field-mice, and none more than the myriads of fine, silvery lines that stretched everywhere, all over the land. From every tree, and bush, and weed clump, from every corn-stalk and fence stake, seemingly from each leaf and grass blade in all the woodland, these lines were drawn. It was as if each leaf and blade of grass were moored fast to the others so that none might get away. They saw these lines most plainly in the early morning, but they were there all day, for when the field-mice ventured into the grass they could still see the tiny threads stretched about.

"Spiders, of course," replied the bat shortly when they asked him. "Some of them are young ones, practicing spinning. Others are grown ones, getting ready to fly."

"Flying spiders—this is something new,"

thought the field-mice. But they got little more out of the bat when they asked him to explain. The chill of approaching winter was in his bones, and made him nervous and irritable, and he could think of little else than the time when he must hang himself up for the winter's sleep.

But they found out. Always, if nobody cared to tell them, the little field-mice watched until they learned things for themselves. On the way home from the corn field one morning, just when the sun was rising and lighting up the lines of web so that they glistened like silver wires, they saw a queer little spider going through what seemed to them a very queer performance. He seemed to be actually wasting his web. He was standing on the top of a broken ragweed, his head bent down close to the weed and his abdomen tilted up into the air as high as he could reach. From his spinnerets floated away towards the sun a thread of web so long and so fine and so wavy in the light breeze that they could not see the end of it. If they

had known the story of Jack and his bean stalk they might have likened this thread to the magic growth.

It was an odd-looking little spider that perched on the weed. They had often seen his kind spinning a tiny web among the short grass and fallen leaves of the woodland, where he lived on tiny insects. He was as smooth and shiny as a beetle. The front half of his body was a beautiful orange colour, as if the frost had touched him as well as the leaves. And Tan thought that the colour must have run a little, for his legs also were partly orange tinted. He had a very curious bump on the top of his head which Tan had never seen on any other kind of spider. Tan wondered whether he had been hit on the head, or perhaps stung by a bee, and swelled up to that odd shape.

"What kind of web, Little Brother?" asked Tan.

The little spider turned and stared at them to be sure that he was not in danger of being eaten. But though he had eight eyes, he

could see nothing clearly unless it were quite near him, and he could not tell who had spoken.

"Who are you?" he demanded shortly.

"Only Tan, the field-mouse. I never saw a web like this one."

"Oh, I'm not laying a snare; I am getting ready to fly."

So, then, this was a flying spider. The bat had not deceived them—there really are spiders that fly, and perhaps they might be about to witness that feat. So they remained and watched. What they saw had little the appearance of anything about to fly—a very small spider, standing in a comical position, with his head down and his abdomen in the air, and a thread of web stretching away from him. They saw no wings, nor anything that looked like wings—not even flaps of skin such as the flying squirrel uses.

"Are you called the Flying Spider, then?" asked Teckle.

"No. My name is Erigone."

"Is it you who spins all these lines from

tree to tree, and all across the grass and weeds?"

"No, not all. I spin some, and my brothers and sisters and cousins spin some. But a great deal of the lines you see were spun by the youngsters of a great many kinds of spiders. When they get old enough to find out that they can spin, they take great delight in throwing out their threads into the wind, and letting them drift about."

"But how do they manage to stretch them so tightly from one tree top to another, away up in the air? There must be a great deal more hard work than sport about that."

"They don't do the stretching. Catch them climbing trees to fasten their lines! Not they. All they do is to cast their webs forth into the air. It is the wind that carries them about and stretches them. Those lazy young ones do not even spin snares until they get hungry."

"There must be a great many spiders, to spin so many lines."

"Count them yourself—I can't. You re-

member how thick the spiders are all over the ground, the grass and the trees, don't you? Well, each mother spider lays so many eggs that I don't know how to tell you the number. More than the number of all your claws many times over. Two or three or four times a summer she lays eggs and spins a sort of sack or cocoon for them, and keeps them on her back, or between her feet, or in her nest, or fastens them to the grass, according to her family custom. And when all these youngsters get big enough to begin to spin, you can see that they turn out a great deal of web. That is how the whole land is filled with lines this morning."

Several times while he was talking the spider paused, ceased to spin out more web, and grasped the top of the weed firmly with all eight of his feet. Presently he would relax his hold, and go on talking and spinning.

"I'm going very soon, Little Brother," he said, after one very long pause during which he seemed to have great trouble to keep his footing, though Tan and Teckle did not then

know what was the trouble. "The next breath of breeze will surely bear me away. I have out now more line than I can manage."

Even then Tan and Teckle did not fully understand what he meant, so they watched in silence. The little spider went on spinning out his web, and presently, as the sun rose higher, there came a stronger breath of the breeze from the west. In spite of his trying to cling fast to the weed, the spider was torn away and was borne aloft by the web he had spun. Now they understood at last what he had meant when he said that he would soon be gone, and they understood how the spider flies.

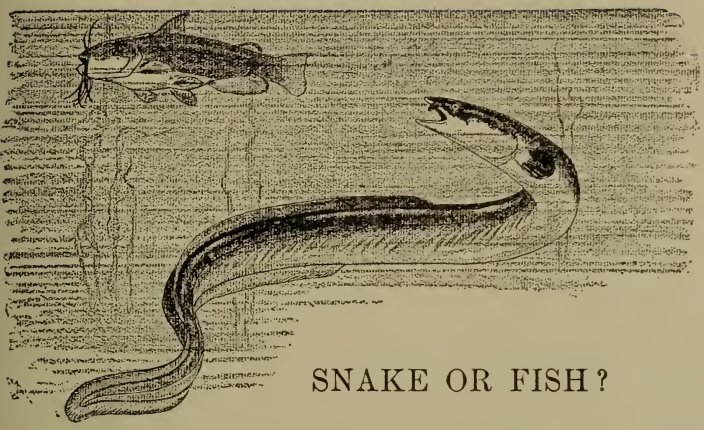
At first the little fellow hung head downward, in what the field-mice thought must be a very uncomfortable position, though he probably minded it not at all. But presently he reached up with a long leg, caught the web with one foot, and pulled himself up. If he wanted to, he could of course spin for himself a tiny hammock, but very likely he was perfectly comfortable just hanging to the thread.

When he had pulled himself upright, the little aeronaut waved a leg at the field-mice, and called out some word of farewell, but he was already so high in the air that they could not make out what he said. They watched him as far as they could see him, floating up, and up, and up, right into the eye of the sun, swayed about as the breeze blew, and riding safely and securely across the great corn field.

Then he was gone, and Tan and Teckle bethought themselves that it was broad day, and they ought to be safe in the stump. And, as they scampered home, they said to each other, "So that's the way the spider manages to fly, is it?" At another time they learned that there is a spider which comes nearer to real flight than the one they had just seen. This spider has a membrane stretched along his sides, which he uses very much as a flying squirrel uses the flaps of skin stretched between his fore legs and hind legs. When this spider leaps through the air after his prey he can actually sail for some distance.

But the field-mice tried to fancy what it must be like to go sailing across the fields as their little friend had just done, riding high and higher up into the soft sky and among the feathery clouds. The spider is so light that if he should fall he would not be hurt; and if he should drop into a river he can run on the water; and no matter where he alights he can spin a snare and catch insects. It must be great sport for a spider, they thought.

But for them, the more they thought of it, the better content they were to go on living in the old hollow oak stump, among the friends they had found in the woodland. Their home was safe, they knew, and their neighbours kind, and they would not like to move to another place, whether by walking or by flying.



SNAKE OR FISH?

NO eye but that of an owl, or a mink, or a cat, or some other creature designed especially to see in the darkest night, could have spied him as he slid back and forth through the deep pool in Pleasant Run brook. If you had been there, and if your eyes had been enough like the owl's to enable you to see, at the very first glance you would have said, "a snake."

For this strange creature had almost exactly the form and movements of a snake. It was more than two feet long, and not larger than a child's wrist. There were the pointed head, the beady eyes, the writhing grace of a snake in its speedy movements through

the water, and not a sign of a leg or foot or flipper.

And when a stupid little catfish came swimming by, intent only on finding worms that had been washed into the pool by a shower just passed, the odd creature caught him exactly as a snake would have done—gave a quick, darting movement of the head, and seized the unlucky fish with his strong teeth, and, after a short struggle, swallowed him whole.

Yet the stranger was unlike a snake in that he never once came to the surface to breathe, as a snake must do. Nor did he have nostrils at the tip of his pointed muzzle as a snake has, but little slits on each side, just behind the head. And when presently the mink came softly paddling into the pool looking for crawfish, or minnows, or whatever he could find to eat, the odd stranger darted with great speed to the bottom of the pool and literally dived head first into the soft mud and disappeared.

What was it, then, that looked, moved, and

acted so much like a snake, yet lived under the water all the time, and breathed water through slits in his neck instead of air through nostrils? Tan wondered much about it. He was afraid, and dared not move from the mouth of the muskrat's tunnel where he sat crouched behind a tuft of grass, lest this active stranger should dart from the ooze and eat him as he had eaten the catfish. It was long before he dared go home.

Tan wanted to ask about this queer creature, but the muskrat had gone away since his narrow escape from the mink. So Tan went to Old Croaker, the great toad, who still spent most of his days sleeping in one of the hollow roots of Tan's old stump, and his nights catching insects and trilling his songs along the brink of the brook.

"That was the eel," replied Old Croaker. "He has lived in that pool for two years, but I think this will be his last. Next spring he will start back to the sea."

"The sea? Do you mean the great water, far away, where the water from our brook

flows? I have heard of it from the blackbird and the old turkey buzzard, but I thought that none but birds make that journey."

"I do not know how or why, Little Brother. I only know that when the eels are grown they return to the sea where they were hatched, and that they never come here again."

It was long before Tan could find any creature able to tell him why the eel returns to the sea, or indeed why it ever leaves the sea if it is hatched there. He was afraid to ask the eel himself, for he had seen what sharp teeth and what a ferocious appetite he has. The minnows were silly little things, and knew less even than Tan—indeed, they began to play among themselves, and swam away while he was asking them. The bat, who knew more than most creatures because of his living among both the runners and the flyers, could help him but little.

"Why don't you go to the snapping turtle?" inquired the bat when Tan asked him puzzling questions. "He has lived in

that pool for more years than you have claws on all your feet. He could tell you all about it."

"For the same reason that you do not go to the cat when you want to know anything," replied Tan. "He'd eat me first and answer me afterwards."

"That's true. I hadn't thought of that." And the bat grinned. "Well, then, the frog ought to know."

But the frog did not, and was not interested in knowing, as he said very plainly. He was as much afraid of the eel as Tan was—perhaps more, for he had to spend much of his time in the water. He had heard that eels grow from horsehairs that fall into the water, but he did not know.

It happened one day that a very small soft-shelled turtle, a cousin of the old snapping turtle, crept out of the water to sun himself on the bank, and Tan spied him. He was too small to have caught a field-mouse if he had wished, so Tan was not afraid to accost him. And he had lived many years in the pool, for

turtles grow slowly, and so he knew the family history of almost everybody in the pool. And from him Tan learned many of the curious ways of the eel.

For all his snaky looks, the eel is truly a fish, for he lives in the water and breathes it through gills instead of breathing air into lungs. And he was really hatched in the sea, as Old Croaker said. This eel was one of many, many thousands who first opened their eyes to the world in the warm, salty waters of the Gulf of Mexico, a thousand miles from the pool where he lived. At first he was very small and slender and transparent so that he looked like a hair, as the frog had said he was. But he grew very rapidly as he ate little marine animals, and in a few weeks he was as long as one's finger.

Then, with all his little brothers and sisters and cousins, hundreds and thousands of them, the little eel made his way into the mouth of the great Mississippi River and started to swim up its mighty stream.

What caused them to leave the warm, salt

water where they were hatched, and enter the cooler, turbid current of the river? Mother Nature spoke to them in her own way, which all her creatures understand but cannot explain. Some craving inside moved them to seek the fresh water and move up the stream. They could no more have told why than the robin can explain why he goes north in spring instead of building his nest in the south where it is always warm.

But they heard and understood good old Mother Nature's call, these little eels, and they went swarming up the river. Some went into the Red River when they came to its mouth, some into the Arkansas, some into the Missouri, some into the Illinois, but this particular one turned into the Ohio River. Up that stream he went, and into the Wabash. Then into the White River, and into the east fork of it, and then into Nineveh creek, and thence into Pleasant Run brook, and so to the little pool where he had lived for two years.

He had spent his time much as a snapping

turtle does. He would burrow deep into the mud at the bottom of the pool, with just his muzzle and his keen eyes showing, and looking exactly like a pebble or a bit of wood lying on the ooze. But let a worm, or a minnow, or a crawfish or even a duckling come within reach, and quick as an eyelash it was seized and eaten.

Usually it is only on the darkest night that the eel will come out of the mud and swim about, but he is a beautiful and graceful swimmer when he cares to move. Few fish are stronger or swifter in the water, and if he cares to leave the water and get on the bank, as he sometimes needs to do in his travels, he can even climb over brush and logs and rocks with the agility of a snake.

This eel was once almost caught and eaten himself, for eels are as good to eat as fish. It was one summer night, when the three boys of the Bradley farm were catching catfish, which bite readily by night. They had baited their hooks with worms, and were dragging them along the bottom of the pool.

One dropped near where the eel lay hidden in the mud, and as soon as it was within reach he darted forth his head and seized it.

The boy felt a heavy jerk at his line, and tried to pull it out of the water. The eel was lifted half his length from the mud before he realized that something was pulling at him. Then he exerted his strength, which is great for one of his size. With a mighty jerk he almost tore the rod from the astonished boy's hand, and with a snap of his powerful jaws he broke the hook short off. Then he dived to the bottom of the mud under the pool, and at his leisure worked the bit of hook out of his mouth.

And for many a day thereafter the boy had a story to tell of the big, big fish which he had almost caught, but which broke his hook and got away.

The winters the eel spent deep in the mud, as far back under the bank as he could get. He very much disliked cold weather, so when the nights grew chill he burrowed deep down, coiled up in a knot, and went to sleep until

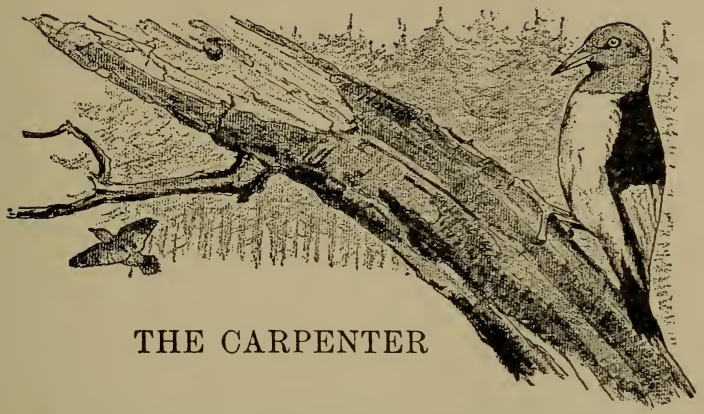
spring came again. He would do the same thing, the little turtle said, the next winter; but as Old Croaker had predicted, when another spring came he would heed the call of old Mother Nature and start down to the sea again.

The grown eels return to the sea to mate, and when the eggs are laid in some safe spot the eels die. So it is that the eels which each spring ascend the rivers are young ones, and those which go down to the sea are old ones.

"Will you go to the sea, too, when you are grown?" asked Tan.

"I go to the sea!" exclaimed the turtle. "Not I. Here I was hatched, here I have lived many summers, and here I stay. I do not like travel. A freshet once washed me down stream almost to Nineveh creek, and I was many, many suns finding my way back."

Tan was not sorry to know that the eel was soon going away never to return, for he was certainly a dangerous neighbour whenever, as sometimes happened, it was necessary for Tan to swim the stream.



THE CARPENTER

AN autumn storm swept across the Bradley farm. It began with an angry piling up of clouds in the southwest, flashes of lightning and growls of thunder, and finally a heavy wind that brought with it a downpour of rain. And as the rain ceased the wind swung around to the northwest, with a chill in its breath that promised more heavy frosts if the clouds cleared away before morning.

The rain and the chill made little difference to Tan and Teckle, the little field-mice, but the wind did something which made a great deal of difference. It broke off, just at the ground, an immense old elm snag that had stood for many a year without leaf or branch

or even bark, and hurled it fair and square across the top of the old oak stump in which they lived.

They were inside at the time, warm and dry and snug. They heard the noise and felt the jar as the old wreck crashed down upon their stump, and at first were afraid ; but as nothing further happened they soon forgot their fright. But when the rain was over and they went outside, they were amazed to see a great log lying across their stump, one end resting on the ground and the other in the air.

They ran inside and climbed up to see whether this would compel any change in their way of living. They found that the stub of a limb had been thrust into the hollow top of their stump, almost closing up the hole, and leaving an opening only just large enough to allow them to pass in and out easily. There was no longer room to admit an animal much larger than themselves.

" How lucky for us," they said. " Now no enemy can get at us, and we can still pass in and out as before."

"Yes, and how fortunate that the bat had gone out. He would have been frightened, and perhaps hurt, and he would have been cross for a moon."

They crept out on top of the stump, and paused under the out-swelling side of the log.

"What's this?" exclaimed Teckle. "Beech-nuts on top of our stump. The squirrel must have carried them here."

"Here are more!" called out Tan. "And here are some in this hole in the log. Somebody has been storing them here. Must have been squirrels."

When the bat came home in the morning, tired and chilly, he was at first disposed to complain at the new arrangement. But he soon saw the advantage of it, and began to talk as if it were all his own planning.

"Why, this makes it just twice as safe, and cozy and comfortable for you," he cried, when he had squeezed himself inside and had hung himself up by the heels. "This will keep out every bit of snow, and no meddling 'coon or 'possum or mink or weasel can get in, un-

less he finds the way through the muskrat's tunnel from below. And even then you can run out here and he cannot follow you."

"Just see the nuts on top of our stump, and in these little holes in the old snag," said Tan. "Is this some squirrel's winter store?"

Tired as he was, the bat scrambled up to look.

"No squirrel ever did that," he said. "The squirrel wants his provisions in a large hole where he can climb in and sleep among them. Look. These are poked into a number of little holes—and the holes were made on purpose for them. I think the woodland carpenter must have done that."

Tan and Teckle knew nothing about a carpenter, so they kept quiet, as they usually did when the bat talked in riddles.

"Know what that is?" he asked, seeing them puzzled. "A carpenter is a worker in wood. I mean the woodpecker. Of course you know him—the black and white bird with the red head that hammers on dead trees all summer long, and chatters so much about it."

Yes, certainly they had seen and heard him, but they did not know that he stored up food for the winter.

"Will he know how to find the nuts, now that the old snag has blown down?" asked Teckle.

"No, I think not. He won't know enough to look in this log—he'll think somebody has run away with his old snag, nuts and all. You'd as well take them yourselves."

So they carried down into their own nest load after load of acorns, beechnuts, grains of corn, and sweet little chinquapins. And as they searched farther they found many little holes in the sides of the old snag, each one full and tightly packed with food. They were busy for a long time, and then were not sure that they had found all.

"I did not know that any bird stores up food for winter," remarked Teckle. "I thought that they go where it is warm, and stay there until summer comes again."

"That is a very odd thing," the bat told them. "Very few birds do store up food for

winter, though there are many that do not go away. Hawks, and owls, and sparrows, and quail—oh, numbers of them stay here all the year. Not one who stays lays up any food, while the woodpecker, who does lay up food, goes away in winter."

Of course Tan and Teckle knew the woodpecker—who could live for a whole summer in the woodland and not know him? If he had never made a sound they would still have noticed him by reason of his beautiful coat. He is all in black and white, as the bat said, except his head, which is a very bright red. He has no song—at least nothing which men call a song, though he makes music in his own way. His chief notes are a peculiar "quir-r-r-rk, quir-r-r-r-rk?" with an inquisitive upturning at the end as if he were asking a question; and a "chir-r-r-r-r-r, chir-r-r-r-r, chir-r-r-r," which is usually sounded when the birds are at play.

Much louder and more noticeable is his drumming on a dead limb, or a board, or a shingle on the roof, or even on the corrugated

iron with which some barns are roofed. Partly with the strong muscles of his neck and partly using the rebound of his beak from the hard substance on which he is drumming, he beats a tattoo that can be heard a long way off. These drummings seem to be signals, and are answered back and forth all over the woodland, just as calls with the voice are answered.

The bat called the woodpecker a carpenter, and it is a fitting name. For that long, sharp beak is used much as a carpenter's chisel is. The bird uses it to tap on the surface of dead trees, and locate by the sound the grubs inside. Then he chisels a hole in the wood and, with a long, sharp, slender tongue, he spears the grub and draws him forth and eats him. That same chisel beak chips off pieces of bark and exposes the insects hiding beneath. This knack of finding and eating insects makes the red-headed woodpecker one of man's best friends.

He is also a fly-catcher of great ability, and from his perch may often be seen to dash

away into the air and catch a passing insect. The boys used to amuse themselves by throwing pebbles past a woodpecker just to see him chase them. He never actually caught a pebble, but he often flew after it to see what kind of strange insect it was. Perhaps he mistook the pebbles for cicadas, or seventeen-year-locusts, of which he is very fond.

The most tedious and difficult task the woodpecker performs with his chisel beak is the building of a nest. No, he does not carry sticks, or weeds, or grass, or feathers, or wool, or mud, or straw, or any of the other things which most birds use. Instead of building a nest on the outside of a tree, he carves himself one on the inside. He always chooses a dead tree, or at least a dead limb, though the rest of the tree may be green. Indeed, he often prefers it so, for the green leaves then hide the entrance to his nest. In the far west, where trees are few, and in the east where the trees have been cut down, the woodpecker often annoys the telegraph and

telephone companies by using their poles for a nest.

When he has chosen the site for his nest, the woodpecker with that chisel beak drills a round hole straight in for several inches. Then he turns straight down towards the root of the tree, or the base of the limb if he has chosen a limb, and for a foot, or even two feet or more, he digs below the level of his door so that eggs and young shall be in complete darkness. It is not easy to believe the amount of work a pair of woodpeckers will do with no tools but their beaks.

They could scarcely do the work at all if their feet and tails were not made to assist greatly. The feet have two toes in front and two behind, just like the parrot, so that they can climb up and down the side of a tree. The tail is rather long, and the feathers very stiff, the ends of the quills sticking out beyond the rest of the tail almost like spines. When the bird fixes his claws in the side of the tree, with his body almost upright, these spiny tail feathers are pressed hard against the tree, and

stick into the bark and support much of his weight. Thus he has a powerful leverage when he begins to pound with his beak.

As to the nest, when the hole has been drilled the nest is complete. No downy lining for the woodpecker. No feathers, or wool, or moss. The mother bird lays four or five pure white, shiny eggs on the litter of chips at the bottom of the dark hole, and the father and mother take turns at sitting.

The red-headed woodpecker is a shy bird, and seldom lingers near the nest or makes much noise there ; but the nest is not hard to find if one goes quietly about among the dead trees of the woodland and keeps a sharp lookout. Especially when the young are strong enough to clamber up to the mouth of the nest and call for food, they are easy to find.

The three boys of the Bradley farm more than once caught young woodpeckers and tried to rear them as pets. Sometimes they kept them until they were able to fly fairly well, but for some reason they always died. They

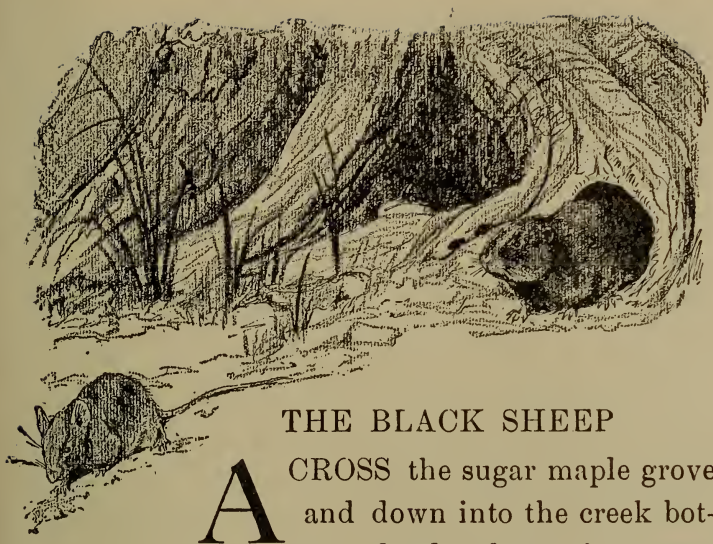
never showed much intelligence, and never a sign of affection for their masters.

The old birds feed the young on wild fruits and berries, insects, grubs and worms. But the little ones will eat almost anything that is given them—perhaps that is why the boys were never able to rear one. They ate worms, grubs, bits of boiled egg, berries, fruit of any kind, bread soaked in water, and beetles of kinds which may or may not have been good for them. But however willing and well-meaning, no boy is as good a mother to a young bird as is the mother bird. After several failures the boys quit trying, and allowed the parent birds to rear their own little ones.

But about this habit of the woodpecker laying up provisions, although he goes south for the winter. Books by wise men say that the red-headed woodpecker always migrates; but the three boys of the Bradley farm would tell you that he is at least very irregular about it. If all the woodpeckers do go away, some go so late that they might almost as well have stayed the rest of the winter; and some return so

early that they, too, had almost as well not have gone at all. There was not a month of the year when a woodpecker could not be found. It must have been for these late departures and early arrivals that the food was stored up, for in the dead of winter insects are few and not easy to find.

Whatever his reasons, it is certain that the woodpecker had put up a generous store of nuts and corn, and that the autumn storm brought it right to the door of Tan and Teckle, who were glad to add it to what they had already laid away for winter.



THE BLACK SHEEP

ACROSS the sugar maple grove and down into the creek bottom lands along the grass-grown track lumbered a heavy farm wagon, drawn by a team of large, strong mules. On the driver's seat was one of the hired men, and in the body of the wagon, romping and playing among a number of barrels and kegs, were the three boys of the Bradley farm and their dog. They were going to a neighbour's to help make cider, and were taking with them sacks in which to carry apples, and barrels to hold the cider.

The boys were beating each other with the sacks, shouting and laughing, while the dog

barked his enjoyment, the hired man grinned at the fun, and the mules slanted their long ears backward trying to find in the hullabaloo some excuse to run away.

"Oh, there's a mouse! There's a mouse!" called a boy as he lifted a sack from a keg.

"Turn him out and let Colonel have 'im," said one.

The boy could easily have reached into the keg and caught the mouse himself, but thought it more fun to let the dog scramble for it. So he tipped the keg suddenly over, and the mouse tumbled to the floor of the wagon. Colonel, the favourite dog, leaped for it, but in the confusion of tumbling barrels and jostling boys the mouse slipped beneath another keg. A boy lifted the keg that the dog might get at him, when the mouse, seeing his danger, darted into a crack in the floor of the wagon, and so fell through to the ground.

Pell-mell the boys and dog leaped from the wagon in chase, but the mouse dodged their first rush, ran beneath a fallen tree, and just

as the dog was within reach, scrambled into the old hollow stump where lived Tan and Teckle, the little field-mice.

The dog whined in disappointment, and gnawed at the hollow root into which the mouse had run. One boy stood debating with himself what to do, but the others called to him to come away. And, as the hired man drove steadily on, he whistled to the dog and ran after the wagon, leaving the mouse in safety.

"Let 'im go," said one. "He got away fair."

"Yes, let him try earning his own living a while," said another. "It'll do him good. He'll appreciate home cooking when he gets back."

"Do you s'pose he'll ever find the way back to the house?"

"Trust him! It isn't a mile. He'll eat Thanksgiving dinner with us, at the very latest."

Inside the stump reigned terror when the boys and dog were heard in the woodland.

And when the frightened little blue-gray mouse ran into the hollow, and the boys shouted and the dog whined outside, Tan and Teckle were sure that their stump was to be torn apart and themselves caught and killed along with the stranger. But when the wagon had clattered its noisy way across the creek, and along the farther bank, and so out of sight and hearing, and they were still unharmed, they took a good look at their visitor.

He was smaller than the field-mice, with a long, slender muzzle, and a much longer tail. He grew calm almost as soon as the boys had turned away from the stump, as if he were used to have such narrow escapes and did not mind them.

"May danger keep afar from you," said Tan.

"Plenty be yours," responded the visitor courteously. "How do you happen to be so far from the house? Have you, too, been carried away by mistake?" he asked.

"No, we live here," said Tan, simply.

"Do you mean to tell me that you live always in this awful place? I have heard

that some of our people stay out here, but I never believed it until now."

"Perhaps it is an awful place," retorted Tan, "but I notice you didn't wait to be invited in."

"I don't mean it that way; it is really very cozy and nice. I mean, so far from the cellar and the pantry and the stoves. It must be so very inconvenient."

Tan and Teckle knew nothing about these things, and could not see why their stump was not as good a place as any in the world.

"And you're welcome to share the stump with us," Teckle said. "Here is room for a nest as large as ours, and since we got the woodpecker's store of nuts we have enough for all."

The house mouse knew nothing about woodpeckers and their stores, but he was glad to be welcomed and not chased forth into the unknown dangers of the woodland.

Soon there was something for all to eat. The house mouse knew how to chisel the soft heart out of the grains of corn—he had often

done that. And he had often eaten nuts which the boys brought to the house. But he had no taste for the bits of bark and grass roots which Tan and Teckle liked.

"Do you mean to say," he demanded, "that this is all the farmer keeps here for you to eat? I wonder you look so well. Why don't you come up to the house where there is plenty of everything?"

"What is there lacking here that we could have at the farmhouse?" asked Teckle, much surprised that they had not everything that any one could wish.

"Doesn't he furnish you with cheese, or butter, or bread, or apples, or bacon, or cake, or sugar, or even milk?"

"Man furnishes us nothing," Tan told him. "The nuts and roots and bark we gather for ourselves. The corn and wheat we get in the fields when man has taken what he wants and has left some on the ground."

"And you have to gather these things yourselves? Man lets you do all that work?"

The house mouse could scarcely believe

that they were not making sport of him, but the field-mice assured him that they had always lived just so, proud of their independence.

"But how do you keep warm in winter? No man lives here, and I see no way of making this place warm. Now in the farmhouse, man always has fires in winter, keeping the house warm and pleasant, and making a fine dim light to play by when he is asleep."

"The only thing we know that keeps us warm is the sun, and man has nothing to do with that. When it is only a little cold we shall not mind it; if it gets too bitter we will curl up and sleep until it is warmer," Tan told him. They had never yet seen a winter, but old Mother Nature had told them, in her own way, what they must do.

"Do you have any excitement? The farmer keeps numbers of cats to catch us at the house—and a cat is many times bigger than a mouse, and must eat many times more food. But that is man's idea of saving what we eat. It is great fun to tease the cat—creep

to the mouth of a hole, and pretend you are going out, and make him wait, and wait, and sometimes jump and miss. Do you have any sport like that?"

"Yes," replied Tan drily, "you can have all the sport you want. You might try teasing the owl if you'll enjoy it. And the mink would afford you a little excitement. And a snake would delight you, I have no doubt. Or, if you like the water, there's a snapping turtle, and an eel, and any number of fish in the brook."

When Tan had explained what all these creatures were, and how they tried day and night to catch and eat him, the house mouse declared that he was going back to the house at once.

"This is a dreadful way to live," he told the field-mice. "No way to keep warm except just to sleep if you get too cold; nothing to eat but what we have just had, and you have to work all summer to get enough of that to keep you alive in winter; instead of a few cats to tease, a whole woods full of owls and

minks and snakes and other monsters to catch you when you go out to get something to keep from starving. I will start as soon as it is dark, and I will sleep in the farmhouse to-morrow."

"I should think you'd be ashamed to live in the man's house when he does not want you, and to eat the food he gathers for himself, and depend on him to furnish you everything you need."

Tan highly disapproved any form of dependence.

"It does not belong to man," declared the house mouse. "Who does all his work? The horse. Why does he keep cows and pigs and chickens, and kill the meat eaters who try to take them? Because he wants to kill and eat them himself. He lives by the labour and the lives of others, and it is right for us to live off him if we can. You do your share, too. I have heard that your brothers live in his grain stacks, and ruin more than they eat. And others of your family live in the orchard, and in the winter gnaw bark off the apple

trees and kill them. And I notice that you have a nest full of corn and wheat.

"You are right to do it, but you need not find fault with me for going a little farther and making man furnish me with everything."

That very night the house mouse started back to the farmhouse. But he was far from sleeping in the house the next day, as he had boasted he would. How he knew the direction nobody can tell, but he did know it. He made his way in the twilight to the old water gate across Pleasant Run brook, and scampered across it in safety. He got across without adventure only because the screech owl was at that moment trying to find a fussy sparrow which was complaining and moving about on his perch in the wild grape-vine.

Once across the brook, the mouse followed the fence row, running on the rails, and hiding under them when he was frightened, which was very, very often. And with good cause, too. For the red fox had been foiled in his attempt to get a hen that evening, and on his way back to the woodland he met the mouse on

his travels. The fox was just too late to catch the mouse before he got under a rail lying very close to the ground, and when he tried to dig him out the mouse scrambled from place to place until he found a hollow rail and hid in it until the fox grew tired and went away.

Farther along an owl made a swoop at the little fellow, and missed him by the barest fraction of a second as he leaped to the other side of the fence. And again he had to lie hidden for a long time.

Soon after this adventure he found a burrow running deep into the ground, and stopped to rest in the mouth of it. Well it was that he did, for the mink, too, was travelling along that fence row. At sight of him the mouse ran headlong into the burrow, and to the very bottom of it. The mink started to dig him out, but after working for a little while, found that the burrow was deeper than he thought, and went away. But the mouse, fearing that the mink was watching at the hole like a cat, did not come out at all that night. All next day he lay in the burrow with nothing to eat,

and at night took up his journey again, hunted at every step by some enemy.

It was many a day after his boast in the old stump that a thin, hungry, tired, frightened house mouse crept in at a cellar window, and made his way to the nest behind the cellar stairs of the farmhouse. What tales he had to tell the dozens of brothers and sisters and cousins who crowded around him to hear! They had all thought that the cat got him that day when he climbed into the keg among the sacks, and was carried out by the hired man and taken away in the farm wagon.

Wild stories he recited for them of the outside world. And the thing they could least understand was the account of the two little field-mice who lived in a hollow stump, and had so many enemies to watch, and had to gather all their food for themselves, and had so few things to eat, and yet were so bright and cheerful and happy. The house mice could never understand how that could be.

THE BIRD WHO DOESN'T CARE

"IF I were as lazy as some people, I think I would go just a little farther, and not take the trouble to come up north at all," said the old turkey buzzard, wiping his beak clumsily on the log whereon he sat in the warm, autumnal sunshine. He had just feasted off dead pig until he was too heavy to fly. There had been cholera among the farmer's pigs that year, and the old turkey buzzard had found life very pleasant. There were many dead pigs to be eaten. For that reason he had delayed his yearly journey to the south.

Tan and Teckle, the little field-mice, were uncertain what the great bird meant. They had always thought that if there were a lazy

bird in the world, or one careless in his personal habits, it was the old turkey buzzard. But they would not say such a thing to him. So they kept quiet, and presently he went on, talking as much to himself as to them:

"You'd think now, to see them all so sociable and pleasant, with their young ones among them, making ready to go south, that they'd lived a perfectly honest and respectable life all summer, and had done all the work expected of them. Wouldn't you, now?"

Tan looked in the direction where the old turkey buzzard's gaze was fixed, and saw a flock of blackish-brown birds wheeling overhead, and presently saw them settle on the ground. They were the cowbirds. He knew them perfectly well by sight, for all summer long they had lived in the pasture among the cattle, happy and contented and never quarrelsome, and he had always thought them very pleasant neighbours indeed.

"Well," he replied to the old turkey buzzard's question, "they have been very quiet

"AND YOU NEVER WILL SEE THEM DO ANYTHING LIKE WORK," WENT ON THE BUZZARD

all summer. I do not see why they are not pleasant to have around."

"Ever see them do anything but eat?"

Tan had to admit that he had not.

"Never saw one of them building a nest, did you?"

Though he had not thought of it before, Tan again had to say no.

"There are numbers of young birds in that flock; do you see any of the old ones feeding them, or looking after them in any way?"

No, the young ones seemed to have to seek their own food, just as the old birds did.

"And you never will see them do anything like work," went on the buzzard, his head growing redder than ever with anger. "They never pair off as respectable birds do; they live all together in one flock. They never build a nest; when the female is ready to lay an egg she hunts the nest of a sparrow or some other small bird, lays her egg in its nest, and goes back to the flock. They never sit on their eggs, nor feed the young, nor do any of the things other birds do to bring up a

family. They just live together and eat, and make others hatch their eggs and feed their young."

The old turkey buzzard had grown so excited by this time, quite contrary to his usual custom, that he actually spread his wings and flapped away, heavy as he was from his feast.

It was a very bad account he had given of the cowbird, but Tan and Teckle thought that there might be some mistake. So one day, when the flock of cowbirds had followed the cattle down into the woodland pasture, they asked them about it.

"Is it true that you build no nest?" Teckle asked one of the mother birds.

"Of course it is true; what of it?" was the reply.

"I thought all birds build nests and take care of their young ones."

"What's the use? The other birds have nests already built, so why should I trouble to build another? And the other birds are going to sit on their eggs, so if I can put mine in the same nest it is no harder work

for them to hatch mine with theirs. And while they are carrying food to their own young they might as well carry a little more, and feed mine."

"What do the other birds think of it?"

"Most of them are so stupid that they never know it at all. They sit on my eggs, hatch my little ones, and bring them up with their own, and never know the difference. And if they did, I don't care."

"What do they do when they do find out?"

"Oh, sometimes they build a new nest on top of the old, and leave my egg in the old nest, and lay fresh eggs in the new nest. But that is only one egg lost, and I don't care."

The flock rose in the air and flew away to another herd of cattle, to eat the insects that always swarm around the herds.

So the old turkey buzzard's story was true. These birds shirk all the work of bringing up their little ones.

But Tan, also, was right—the cowbird is not an unpleasant neighbour. He never fights

or quarrels, never meddles with any other bird's affairs except in the matter of sneaking eggs into the nest, and is always care-free and happy. He is very like some people who put all their troubles on another person's shoulders and then take great credit to themselves for being cheerful.

When the cowbird lays her egg in another bird's nest, she usually chooses the nest of a bird smaller than herself. This is not because she is afraid of the other bird, but because her little one will be bigger and stronger than the young of the other bird, and so get a larger share of the food. It is even said that the young cowbird gets under the other little birds and pushes them out of the nest, but this has not been fully shown. It is surely bad enough to take most of the food, and let the rightful occupants of the nest go hungry; it would be very ungrateful to throw out of the nest the little ones of the parent birds who rear the foundlings.

Wise men, who have spent a great deal of time and taken a great deal of pains to watch

the cowbird, have never seen the young one throw its foster brothers and sisters out of the nest. But they have sometimes seen the foster parents carrying away the dead bodies of their own little ones, and they are justified in believing that the young cowbird was so strong and so noisy that it crowded the mother bird's own nestlings to one side, and trampled upon them, and got all the food that the parent birds brought, so that the intruder lived and grew strong while the others starved.

Mother Nature has adapted the cowbird in a very curious way to fit her eggs and little ones to be cared for by other birds. If the cowbird lays its egg in a nest which is just finished, and before the owner of the nest has laid her eggs in it, very often the bird which built the nest will leave it and build a new one, and the cowbird's egg will not be hatched. And if the cowbird waits until the other bird has laid her eggs, and then puts her egg into the nest, the mother bird would hatch her own eggs first, and then quit sit-

ting to feed her little ones, and again the cowbird's egg would not be hatched—that is, this would happen if the eggs all took the same time to hatch.

But it has been found that the cowbird's eggs will hatch two or three days earlier than the eggs of the smaller birds in whose nests they are usually laid. So the cowbird can safely wait until the other bird lays her eggs, and then lay her own in the nest with them, perfectly sure that her own little one will hatch before the others, and so get the most attention.

Just how the cowbird acquired this habit which so aroused the anger of the old turkey buzzard may never be known. Men who know a great deal about these birds think that it may have started in quarrels over nests, when cowbirds tried to take possession of nests that other birds had made, and were driven away after one or more eggs had been laid, and the rightful owner of the nest hatched and reared the little cowbirds.

Whatever the beginning, the habit is now

firmly fixed in the cowbirds all over America, from one ocean almost to the other, wherever they are found. They do not mate and live in pairs, but flock together all the summer long, neither building nests, sitting on the eggs, nor feeding their young. No wonder the old turkey buzzard was vexed when he thought of such irregular habits.

There is a very strange similarity of habits in this regard between two families of birds not at all related, and with a wide ocean between them so that neither could have learned it from the other. In Europe is a bird called the cuckoo, which does almost exactly the same trick as the cowbird. But the cuckoo is a large bird, and cannot get into the nest of a little bird, so she is driven to lay her egg on the ground, and take it in her beak and carry it to the nest of some little bird.

It is odd that a female cuckoo, which has been hatched and reared by one kind of bird, will seek out the nest of that same kind of bird for her egg when she is grown ; and still more odd that her egg is often coloured so like

that of the bird in whose nest it is placed that it can scarcely be told from the rightful occupant's eggs. At first this was thought a fairy story when a man said that he had found such cases, but a number of men watched for several summers, and they finally agreed that a female cuckoo will seek the nest of the kind of bird which reared her, and will lay eggs coloured like those of that bird. So it is that cuckoos lay eggs of very different colours according to the kind of nest they use.

Now in America there is a cuckoo very closely related to the European cuckoo, in looks and actions and all its habits except the one of laying its eggs in another bird's nest. The American cuckoo never does this, but builds a nest and rears its young with great affection.

In Europe there is also a bird very like the American cowbird, but it lacks this one bad habit of shirking the work of building a nest and bringing up a family.

"I don't see how any mother could be so foolish as not to know her own young," said

Teckle when the cowbird had told her how she gets rid of the work of bringing up a family. "I should know my own little ones among so many I could not count them. Why, suppose the house mouse should put her little ones into my nest—wouldn't I know them at once?"

"Birds are very foolish about that sometimes," said the bat. "I have seen an old hen —old enough to know better—hatch out a brood of ducklings and go wild when they went into the water to swim. She never would believe that they were not her own chickens, and was very certain that they would drown if they went into the water. And I have seen a hen peck to death one of her own chickens because it was hatched under another hen, and given to her a day after she had left the nest with the early ones. A hen doesn't know any more than a horse."

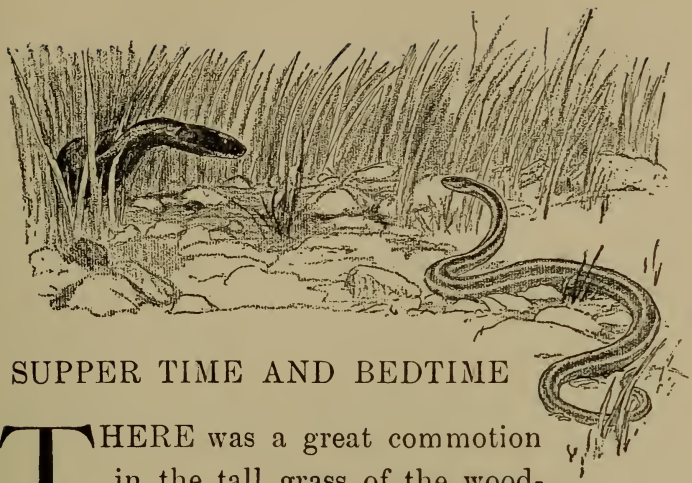
"I saw young turkeys, once, following a hen," remarked Tan.

"Of course," replied the bat scornfully. "A hen will mother anything that comes out

of her nest—goslings, little guineas, ducks, turkeys—I even heard of those boys getting a hen to hatch out some hawk eggs once, but she didn't know how to feed them and they died."

But though all their neighbours talked about the habits of the cowbird, it made no difference. The flock played about the meadows until very late, following the herds of cattle, feeding on insects and seeds alike, and seeming perfectly happy until the time came for them to fly away to the south for the winter.

No matter what the neighbours thought and said, the cowbird did not care.



SUPPER TIME AND BEDTIME

THERE was a great commotion in the tall grass of the woodland. A great, green frog made his way to the creek with prodigious leaps, rising high above the top of the grass at each bound, and expressing his fright by loud croaks. And when he reached the bank he did not pause, but went headlong over the edge into the water with a loud splash, and was seen no more.

A field-sparrow that had been hiding in a tuft of grass took wing, darting this way and that as if she expected to be pursued in the air, and with chatterings of terror went far across the meadow before she alighted.

Old Croaker himself, the fat old toad, big

and dignified and important-looking as he was, cried aloud in fear and hastened to hide himself under the side of a stone.

And all this time, if you had been watching from the top of the old stump in which lived Tan and Teckle, the field-mice, you would have seen nothing more terrible than a gentle waving of the grass tops, showing that some one of the little wild people was passing by.

But they knew—the frogs and the birds and the toads and the insects in the grass. They knew, whether or not they saw it, that beneath those waving grass tops was a long, slender, brownish form, covered with scales instead of hair or feathers, and crawling flat on the ground instead of running on legs. And they knew that at the front of that long, lithe body was a sharp little head with a nose that could smell its prey a long distance off, and with keen little eyes, and with a large mouth armed with many sharp little teeth—a mouth already large, and which could be stretched enough to swallow even so large a creature as Old Croaker the toad.

Yes, it was a garter-snake moving through the grass. The time was at hand when he must get into bed for the winter, and this was his supper time.

He was large for a garter-snake, almost three feet long. In the hot days of summer he had been very swift of motion, and vigorous in his pursuit of prey. But in these days of nightly autumnal frosts he moved much more slowly and uncertainly, which is why so many of his intended victims escaped him.

Even so, not all of them got away. There were many fat, lazy grasshoppers of the kind the boys called "lubbers" that were too heavy and slow to get out of the way. These the snake caught and swallowed in great numbers, and as each was of enormous size, he soon had a very fair supper.

He could still eat a great deal more—oh yes. The garter-snake can stretch almost as if he were made of rubber, and there is no knowing how much more he could have eaten. He would have liked especially to swallow a pair of field-mice as dessert, and if he had not been

interrupted he might have done so. He came gliding out of the tall grass into the little clear space about the old stump, his forked tongue darting in and out of his mouth, his beady eyes watching for the mice which his keen nostrils told him were near.

Tan and Teckle, sitting in the doorway of their hollow stump, heard the commotion in the grass, and guessed the cause of it. They were watching, and saw the snake as soon as he poked his head from the grass. They turned back into the stump without a sound, and ran and hid themselves in its farthest recesses. Even this would not have saved them if something else had not happened just then.

From the opposite direction there came sounds of a disturbance very like that which the garter-snake had caused. Birds screamed and flew, frogs croaked with terror and fled to the water, and all the little creatures took to their heels or their wings, and got away with all the speed they had.

The garter-snake heard the commotion. He thought it might be his mate, who was also out

in the woodland that afternoon getting a supper before her long winter's sleep. But while it might be his mate, again it might not be, and he was wise enough to wait and see before following the field-mice into a hollow stump where an enemy might follow him and have him where there was no escape.

The disturbance in the grass came nearer and nearer, and finally, from the opposite side of the little clearing, a shiny, black, scaly head was thrust from the grass. Two keen eyes looked about, and two nostrils sniffed the air to be sure that all was safe. And then a great blacksnake, full six feet long, glided out into plain view.

At sight of this terrible foe the garter-snake forgot all about the two little field-mice that he had wanted for dessert. Like a whip-lash jerked by an impatient boy he flashed into the grass and ran with all his might. From being the hunter he had in an instant become the hunted, for the blacksnake would swallow him as quickly as he himself would have swallowed the mice, and he fled, as full of ter-

ror as the frogs and the mice and the birds had been at his approach.

Good need he had to run, too, for the black-snake had seen him. Like a shadow the lithe, black form shot across the little clearing and into the grass in pursuit of the garter-snake.

Then there was a most exciting race. With a fourth of his body lifted from the ground so that his head was above the grass tops where he could watch his prey, the blacksnake raced through the grass, making a tremendous rustling. If he had kept in the grass the garter-snake must have been caught, but he was shrewd enough to make for the old worm fence. Through it he dashed, and into a brush heap, out at the farther side, under a decaying log, back to the fence and through it, and down along the other side at top speed.

The blacksnake was thrown off the track by these sudden turnings, and took the wrong direction. The garter-snake, by putting forth his utmost speed, was soon safe on the hill-side far away. The fright had taken away his appetite, and he was ready to seek his

burrow and take his winter's sleep, glad enough that he had not himself been the dessert at the blacksnake's supper.

So the garter-snake made his way up the hill to the meadow where he and his mate and ever so many of their cousins had planned to spend the winter. They had found an old, deserted woodchuck hole which just suited their purpose, and, after making sure that he had not been followed, he crept in. There he found his mate and all the others, already twining themselves into a round ball so that the little heat their bodies make would keep them warm. Gliding down into the depths of the hole, the garter-snake thrust himself into the wriggling mass, and when next day the cold weather came on in earnest, they all fell asleep together.

Though almost every living thing fears the garter-snake, it is one of the most harmless creatures in the world except to those little ones on which it feeds. The garter-snake will always run when man approaches, unless it be a mother snake with little ones to protect; and

even then, if she can get her young out of danger, she will run rather than fight.

Her fighting is mostly pretense, for she really has no weapons which any one need fear. She has no poison and no fangs—nothing but tiny little teeth which help her to catch and hold and swallow her prey. They are so small that they are no more dangerous than little briars, and can rarely make the blood flow from the back of one's hand. She will coil up, and thrust her tongue out, and open wide her mouth and strike as fiercely as the most venomous serpent, but there is no danger in her bite.

As soon as the warm spring days come the snakes uncoil themselves and creep out into the warm sunshine, where they mate and go into the woods and fields in pairs to live. Before long the little snakes are born—yes, born alive, and not hatched from eggs as is the case with many kinds of snakes. There is always a large family, twenty-five to forty little ones to each mother, and one observer reports as many as eighty.

The mother garter-snake is very devoted to her little ones. They are able to run about almost from the first, and catch little insects, but she keeps them close to her, teaching them how to escape from danger, how to hunt for food, what to eat and what to avoid, how to run and how to hide from an enemy. She will fight fiercely in their defense.

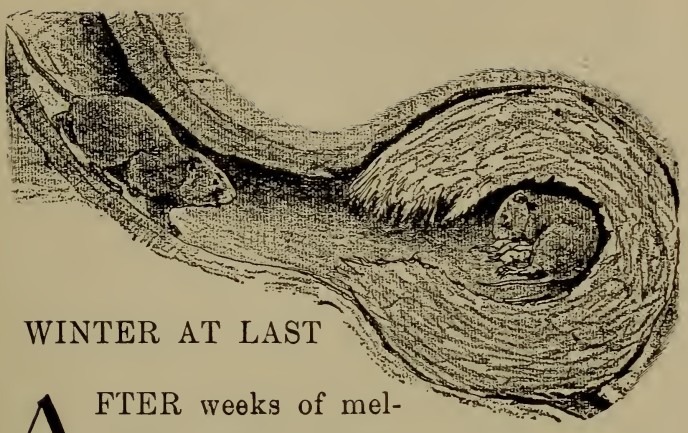
There are many varieties of garter-snake, but except in the matter of size and colour they are very much alike. The common kind is brown above, with yellowish markings, and a dirty white colour beneath. There is always one stripe down the back, and usually one along each side, though sometimes the side stripes are very faint, and sometimes broken up into mottles. Likewise the brown of the back may sometimes be so light as to be a tan, and sometimes so dark as to be almost black. Also the under part may vary from greenish white to dark olive green or almost black.

All garter-snakes are quite at home in the water. They swim, dive, catch and eat minnows, and behave so much like water-snakes

that the ordinary observer cannot tell them apart.

Most people take a foolish pride in being afraid of all snakes, and in killing every one they can. It is little use to tell them how silly and how cruel it is to kill such a harmless creature. Their only reply is "a snake's a snake," and there is no answer to such unreasonable argument. There are really very, very few kinds of poisonous snakes in this country, and most of them have been killed.

The three boys of the Bradley farm soon grew to know that nearly all snakes are harmless, and they never killed one except for an experiment, as when they allowed a snake to swallow Old Croaker, and then cut the snake open to see if the toad were still alive. They often caught and played with garter-snakes and blacksnakes, and laughed at their efforts to bite. And when the snakes learned that they were not harmed, they ceased trying to bite, and even seemed to enjoy having their heads rubbed.



WINTER AT LAST

AFTER weeks of mellow, hazy, dreamy days and cool, crisp nights, winter laid a heavy hand on the old Bradley farm, on woodland and meadow, on field and swamp, on hill and river-bottom. It came on as many storms do in that section, with a chill rain from the southwest. After a downpour of a night and a day the wind veered to the northwest and blew cold, the rain changed first to sleet and then to snow, and when another day dawned there was a thick blanket of white over all the land, the streams ran gurgling as if half choked under bridges of snow-covered ice, and a bitter north wind lashed and stung all who dared face it.

Yes, winter had come, but it had not surprised one of the little wild creatures. Except a few hardy ones like the red-headed woodpecker and the robin, who never leave until they are driven, the birds that journey south for the winter were already on their way. Blackbird and swallow, nightjar and swift, killdee and whippoorwill, all were hundreds of miles away, on their way to the land where it never snows.

Overhead were passing the long, harrow-like lines of wild geese and ducks, who are dressed in coats so warm that they do not feel the cold, and who love to wait for the strong north winds to drive them like ships to their winter home. The herons, blue and white and green, the twittering bluebirds, the chattering blackbirds and the socialistic cowbirds—all had started south in good time.

And those who do not go away for the winter were not surprised. They had known all the time that winter with its snow and cold would come, and they could but wait. The bobwhite quail were cuddled up, each

covey in a circle with tails to the centre, pressed close together for warmth, but so placed that each bird, with a single step forward, had room to spread his wings and whir away. They squatted under the lee of a great log and the snow had drifted over them and completely covered them, but they were warm and comfortable. Their only danger from the storm was that a hard crust might form on top of the snow, and hold them prisoner so long that they would starve. That sometimes happens. Or, the snow might fall so deep and lie on the ground so long that they could get no food. That, too, sometimes happens. Apart from that, almost their only danger was that the red fox might scent them, leap upon them and catch two or three before they could get on the wing.

The owl does not leave his home, winter or summer. Sometimes he goes lean in winter because most of the birds go away; but always there are a few birds, many rabbits and mice, and about the barn there are rats, and at the farmhouse there are chickens. He was in

his hollow tree in the woodland waiting for dark to begin his hunting.

Striped Face, the raccoon, was asleep in his hollow box-elder tree. He can always find something in the way of minnows or birds or roots, unless it is very, very cold; and in that case, being an own cousin to the bear, he can roll himself into a ball and sleep until warm weather.

Many of the insects perished, but they knew from the first that they could live but a single summer. The grasshoppers, the crickets, the katydids, the butterflies—all who had escaped the frosts—were claimed by the bitter cold. But their lifework was done. The grasshoppers had put well-filled egg cases into the ground, and these would hatch out thousands of grasshoppers the next spring. The crickets and katydids had made like provision for the next generation. The butterflies, too, had laid eggs which would either hatch in the spring, or had already hatched, and the caterpillars had attained their growth and had laced themselves up in cocoons for

the winter, and would awaken and emerge in warm weather, with beautiful wings.

Some, like many kinds of spiders, lay asleep among the dead leaves and grasses, and would awaken when warm weather returned. Some had died, but had left cocoons full of eggs which would hatch in the spring.

The ants and the honeybees, who live to be several years old, had all stored up their winter provisions, and were asleep or eating slowly of what they had provided against this time of scarcity.

The frogs and toads and turtles and eels had all buried themselves far below the reach of frost, and were sound asleep, neither knowing nor caring what was the weather. And the bat had hung himself, head downward, in the hollow of an immense sycamore tree deep in the wood, and was safe for the winter.

The squirrels were asleep in their hollow tree, and with them was a great store of corn and nuts against the time when they should waken and be hungry.

The muskrat had made him a huge nest of

sticks and grasses in the creek, and in the cellar of it he had hidden roots, and tender twigs, and such fruit and vegetables as he could find, and was quite safe and happy.

The fish had no need to do anything. Unless the stream should freeze solidly to the bottom they can always move about and get what they need to eat in winter; and it is even claimed that some kinds of fish can be frozen solidly into the ice, and yet take up life anew when they thaw out in the spring.

But how fared Tan and Teckle, the little field-mice, in their old hollow oak stump? They had never seen a winter, but Mother Nature told them what it was to be, and they had laid in ample store of nuts and seeds and corn. So when they found the ground covered deep beneath a mantle of white, and heard the north wind howl and roar through the naked boughs of the forest trees, they were not afraid.

"I'll go out and see what this is like," said Tan, stoutly. So he climbed up from the nest in the lower part of the stump, and stuck his

nose bravely into the snow, while Teckle lay quiet in the warm nest.

"I believe I could find my way to the creek," said Tan to himself. He struck out through the snow, not trying to walk on top, but creeping on the frozen ground and making a tunnel under the snow. In the summer he had made many runways on the ground under the long, matted grass, which partly hid him from view. Now he did the same with the snow.

It was great sport to be able to push right through the snow, and he had no trouble in finding his way to the creek bank. He scrambled down to the water's edge and found a willow clump. Not because he needed it, but just because he could, Tan stripped off some of the soft, sweet bark and made a bundle of it to carry back to the nest. This is one trick which makes field-mice a plague to the farmer when they live about his orchards. The little rascals, under cover of a deep snow, will sometimes girdle young apple trees all the way around so that they die; and in any case if

they gnaw them they scar them and retard their growth and cause them to be weakly.

Tan went here and there, up and down and across the woodland in a dozen directions just for the sport of it. There was something very comforting in the knowledge that he could now go anywhere he chose, at any time of the day or night, without being seen. He ran beneath the deep snow, and neither owl nor fox, nor boy nor dog, nor any other enemy could reach him.

So he drove tunnels out to the old beech tree and grabbled in the leaves for nuts; and to the old hollow log on the creek bank that he might have a second place of refuge in case of sudden danger; and he even made one tunnel across the brook of Pleasant Run on the ice, just to see whether he could reach the old corn-field that way, though he did not try to go that far.

Tan was out for a long, long time. He wondered why Teckle did not come out and join in the fun, for beneath the snow it was neither cold nor dangerous. Finally he ran

back through his newly-built tunnel to the stump, and went scrambling down in haste to the nest.

"Come out and see the new trails I have made!" he called out. "We can go anywhere we choose now, and nobody can see us."

There was no reply, so he paused just outside the nest to listen. Was it possible that any harm could have befallen Teckle while he was away? He heard a faint rustling of the wool and grass that lined the soft, dark old nest, and his ears caught just the faintest squeak, not half so loud as the tiniest chirp of a cricket. Tan's heart bounded with joy. Yes, there it was again—two of them at least—"Squeak! Squeak!" Baby mice!

Tan crept softly into the nest. There lay Teckle, with the soft light of motherhood shining again in her eyes, and beside her, nudging about in the soft lining of the nest, pushing each other away and snuggling close to her for warmth, were nine queer, wrinkly, hairless little field-mice, their eyes tightly

closed, and their voices only the faintest squeak.

Soon there were lively times in the old stump. It was not long until the little ones had their eyes open, and by that time they were strong enough to creep all around the nest. A few more days and they could climb out of the nest and run back and forth through the old stump. Next they were able to climb up and down the inside of the long tap root, and it seemed no time at all until they were romping and storming all over the place.

Lucky it was that they had laid in such store of food, or some one might have gone hungry. Such appetites as the little rascals had! But, besides all that they had gathered for themselves, there was the hoard of nuts and acorns of the woodpeckers which the wind storm had brought them, and the musk-rat had left fruit and vegetables in his burrow, so that there was no danger of any one starving.

All that winter there was snow on the ground, and the family was safe. The young ones

were soon tearing back and forth through the tunnels, trying their new teeth on the willow bark, and digging in the leaves for nuts with no thought of danger. So lived the happy family in the old oak stump, and when another spring came with its warm winds, and the snow was gone, there were nine strong, well-grown young field-mice ready to go out into the woodland and find mates and build nests of their own.

THE END

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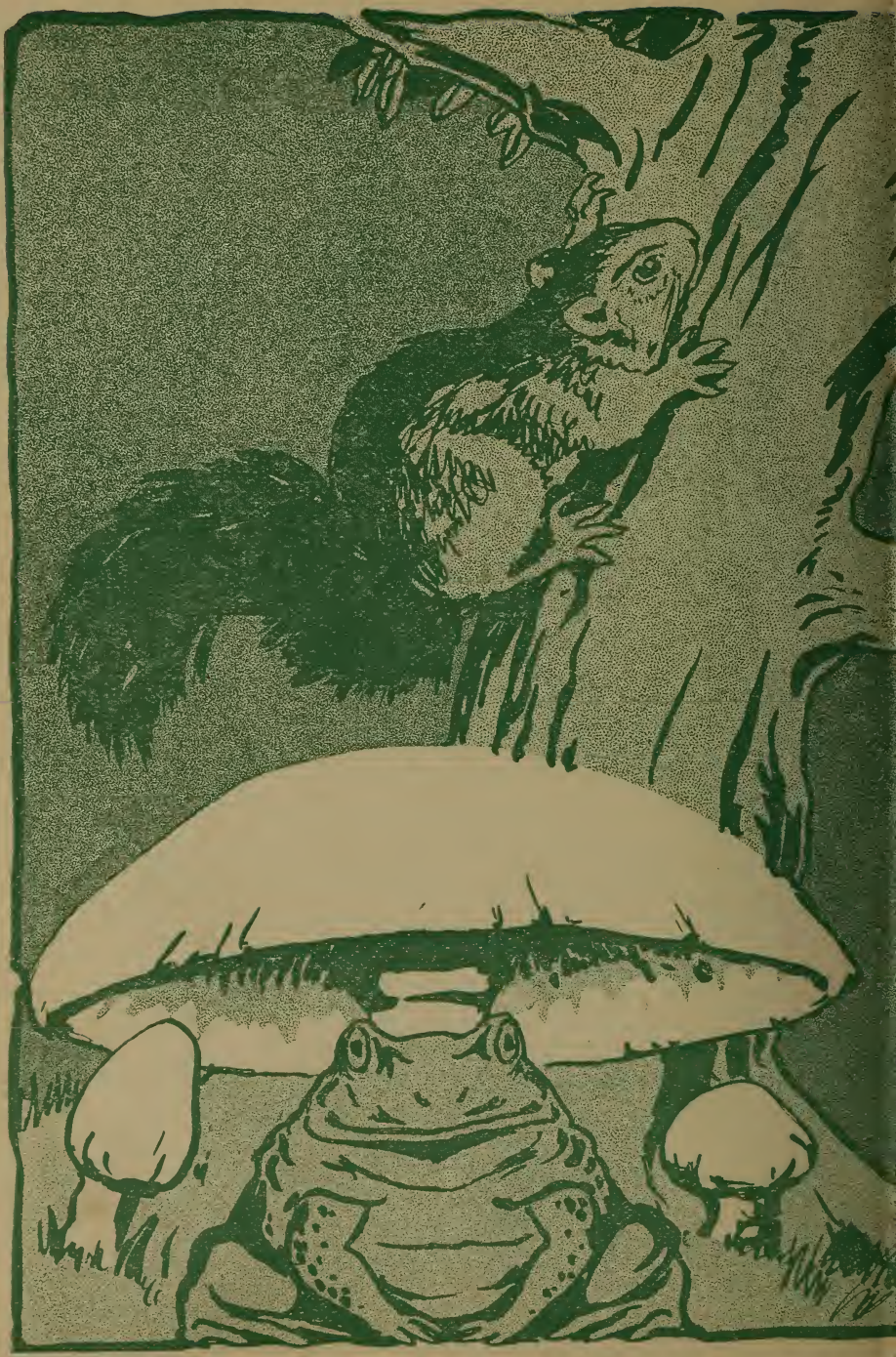

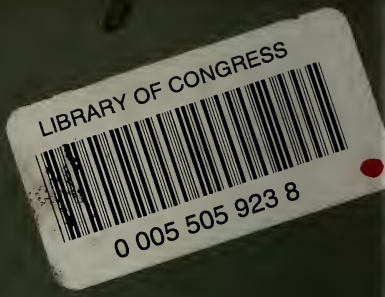
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